

A

PRACTICAL EXPOSITION

GOSPELS OF ST. MATTHEW AND ST. MARK,

IN THE FORM OF

LECTURES,

INTENDED TO ASSIST THE PRACTICE OF DOMESTIC
INSTRUCTION AND DEVOTION.

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THERE are many things in the aspect and character of the present time, which must be seen with alarm by all who receive the scripture as the word of God. Whether they consider the moral condition of a large proportion of their fellow-countrymen, or look towards the future prospects of their country as affected by that state; they see just cause for sorrow and anxiety.

But it would be unreasonable and ungrateful to deny that there are also causes for thankfulness and hope. And amongst the satisfactory signs of the present day, I place in the first rank the increased and increasing habit of family instruction and devotion. Should this habit continue spreading amongst us, as it has spread of late years, especially since the publication of the Bishop of London's "Manual," it would be the brightest ray in the prospects of our land.*

* Besides the "Manual" alluded to, Bp. Wilson's "Family Prayer" is on the list of the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge. Another is published by the Bristol Tract Society.

The following volume of Expository Lectures has been prepared in the hope of assisting family devotion, and of more generally adding to it scriptural instruction. The members of a family are travelling together the same road of life, with the same present obligations and the same future destination. That they should unite in studying that Book which alone can lead them safely to the end, is too natural in itself to require enforcement ; and as a part of family religion, is calculated to prevent the great danger of its degenerating into a lifeless form. The best commentary to accompany such reading, are such remarks as naturally occur to the *head of the family, who is well instructed in the scriptures, and has consulted the various practical expositions with which our libraries are furnished.* Such remarks, though not the best possible remarks, are probably the most applicable to the party assembled, and therefore the most effective.

But this requires more energy than is always possessed, and more leisure for reflection than the business of life universally allows ; and, in reality, the

Another, which was compiled with an especial view to the labouring classes, has been printed at Lancaster, and may also be had at Hatchard's, London. The title is, "A Course of Morning and Evening Prayers, for the Use of the Families of the Poor."

practice of reading scripture in the family is often neglected from the acknowledged difficulty of selecting an exposition.

The present volume has been prepared with the sole object of supplying this deficiency; and, if I should be permitted to fulfil my intention, will be followed by the other historical books of the New Testament. I shall be happy if it should tend to promote, generally, a more uniform attention and a closer application to the scriptures themselves, in every department of christian instruction; because I am assured that this is what individuals most need, and congregations would most profit by. But certainly the purpose kept mainly in view, both in the design and composition of the volume, is to increase the usefulness of family devotion by facilitating the practice of family instruction.

That it may receive the blessing of "the Father of lights," the source of "every good and perfect gift," is the earnest prayer of the Author,

J. B. CHESTER.

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EXPOSITORY LECTURES.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW.

LECTURE I.

BIRTH OF CHRIST AND NAME OF JESUS.

MATT. i.

(Luke iii. 23—38.)

OF Matthew, the writer of this gospel, we learn from his own account (Matt. ix. 9, and x. 3) that he was a publican, or collector of taxes, whom Jesus called from “the receipt of custom” to follow him as his disciple. From that period he attended him throughout his ministry, and is therefore one of those who bore record of what he had seen, and testified that which he knew.

It is believed that he wrote his gospel within eight years of our Lord’s ascension.

Matthew begins with an account of *the generation*, or descent of Jesus Christ, according to the promises, from Abraham and David.

1. *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham.*

2. *Abraham begat Isaac ; and Isaac begat Jacob ; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren ;*

3. *And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar ; and Phares begat Esrom ; and Esrom begat Aram ;*

4. *And Aram begat Aminadab ; and Aminadab begat Naasson ; and Naasson begat Salmon ;*

5. *And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab ; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth ; and Obed begat Jesse ;*

6. *And Jesse begat David the king ; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias ;*

7. *And Solomon begat Roboam ; and Roboam begat Abia ; and Abia begat Asa ;*

8. *And Asa begat Josaphat ; and Josaphat begat Joram ; and Joram begat Ozias ;*

9. *And Ozias begat Joatham ; and Joatham begat Achaz ; and Achaz begat Ezekias ;*

10. *And Ezekias begat Manasses ; and Manasses begat Amon ; and Amon begat Josias ;*

11. *And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon ;*

12. *And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel ; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel ;*

13. *And Zorobabel begat Abiud ; and Abiud begat Eliakim ; and Eliakim begat Azor ;*

14. *And Azor begat Sadoc ; and Sadoc begat Achim ; and Achim begat Eliud ;*

15. *And Eliud begat Eleazar ; and Eleazar begat Matthan ; and Matthan begat Jacob ;*

16. *And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.*

17. *So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations ; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations ; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.*

It had been promised, from the first, that THE CHRIST should spring from the seed of Abraham. He had been also foretold as the son of David.

The genealogy here recorded by St. Matthew, proves that Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus, was so descended : and the genealogy of Mary, given by St. Luke, proves that Jesus himself was so descended. Jesus was born, therefore, as it had been prophesied, and as it was expected, that He should be born who was to “redeem Israel.”

18. *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise : When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.*

19. *Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.*

30. *But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife ; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.*

21. *And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS :¹ for he shall save his people from their sins.*

Such is the meaning of the name JESUS ; a deliverer, a saviour : and it was given to the Son now born into the world, because it described the character which he should bear and the office which he should perform. *To save his people from their sins*

¹ The word Jesus was a name in frequent use among the Jews. It was particularly assigned to him who succeeded Moses in leading the people of Israel into the promised land of Canaan. We call him JOSHUA ; but the name is exactly the same as that of JESUS : and is so written Acts vii. 45, and Heb. iv. 8.

is mentioned as the purpose of his great undertaking, and of his long expected coming.

It is assumed, then, that this is what the world most wanted, and ought to be most grateful for. And we know it was so: Scripture acquaints us, that "in Adam all died;" by that "one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. v. 12.) Since, therefore, "judgment had come upon all men to condemnation," what the world required was a DELIVERER from that judgment. Jesus came to be such a DELIVERER:—not in the sense in which Moses or Joshua were deliverers: but in a sense as different as his birth was different from theirs: he came "to give his life a ransom for many;" to "suffer once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." (1 Pet. iii. 18.)

But the world required something more;—required to be delivered not only from the fatal consequences of sin, but from sin itself. This too is a part of the salvation brought by Jesus. It was for this salvation that St. Paul gave thanks to God: After lamenting his original corruption,—that "in him (that is, in his flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for the good that he would he does not, but the evil which he would not, that he does"—he "thanks God," who has delivered him "from the body of this death through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. vii. 18—25.) To this power he trusted, saying, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 13.) For he had

been assured, and believed the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee." (2 Cor. xii. 9.)

Such is the fulfilment of that gracious purpose announced in the name of Jesus: *he saves his people from their sins*: he saves them from the guilt of sin by his blood; and by the power of his Holy Spirit he saves them from the dominion of sin.

The miraculous birth here related, which makes Jesus, emphatically, the SON of GOD, had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah. (vii. 14.)

22. *Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,*

23. *Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*

24. *Then Joseph being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife;*

25. *And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son; and he called his name JESUS.*

The purpose for which God thus vouchsafed to be "with us," to dwell among men, to live and die in our nature, must have been no light purpose. And it was no light purpose to *save his people from their sins*. For "the wages of sin is death;" "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish;" "the blackness of darkness for ever."

Is he such a DELIVERER to us? He must be, if we belong to the number of *his people*: and if we do not belong to the number of his people, he is "dead in vain; we are yet in our sins." And we have the means at hand of answering the important question, whether, or not, we do belong to the number of his people. This same sentence which

declares to us the office which Christ was designed to perform, enables us to perceive our own condition in respect to him. Has he delivered you from sin itself? If so, he has delivered you from its penalty.

But you will say—no man is altogether freed from sin: for “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

So Scripture declares, and to this our own hearts bear witness. But though the corruption of nature adheres to the sincerest Christian, still he is not under the power of sin as others are; he does not yield to it, but strives against it; he does not indulge it, but mortifies it; he does not love it, but abhors it; he does not desire it, but aspires after more and more holiness, and a more complete renewal of his heart in the image of God. As St. Paul has expressed it, “sin has no more dominion over you.”

If then this is your case; if you have so believed your Saviour, as to be convinced that sin, unless you forsake it, must destroy you; and if, in reliance upon his Spirit, you have renounced it, and are resolved to give it no place in your hearts, and are daily contending against it: then he has fulfilled that promise for you, of which his name is the pledge;—he was *called Jesus, for he should save his people from their sins.*

Observe, on the other hand, that the same title which brings comfort to the disciples of Christ, speaks the sentence of condemnation to the unrepenting transgressor. *He shall save his people from their sins.* Let the transgressor reflect. He

has not saved *me* from sin ; therefore I cannot be one of his people. *From sin* he is ready to save ; even He cannot save those who “ continue in sin.” He has himself declared, that at the last day he will reply to all such,—“ I never knew you ; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

May God give us grace to know our real state, and deliver us alike from thoughtless security, from vain presumption, and from perplexing fears.

LECTURE II.

THE WISE MEN WORSHIP CHRIST.

MATT. ii. 1—12.

(Luke ii. 1—20.)

1. *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,*

2. *Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews ? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.*

These *wise* men were so called, because they observed the appearances of nature and the heavenly bodies—subjects much studied in the eastern countries to which they belonged. The sight of some unusual meteor in the sky attracted their attention ; and, perhaps, the general expectation which

This town lay six miles to the south of Jerusalem.

prevailed, of some mighty king or deliverer, in consequence of the Hebrew prophecies, led them to suppose that this *star* was connected with his coming. God, however, must have communicated to them, by his Spirit, some surer intimation. So we are told afterwards (ver. 12) that he revealed his will to them in a *dream*.

3. *When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

Herod *was troubled*, expecting some rival to his power : and *Jerusalem*, knowing his character, and fearing some new cruelty ; not without too good reason, as soon appeared.

4. *And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.*

5. *And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea : for thus it is written by the prophet,*

6. *And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda ; for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.*

The sense of this prophecy (Micah v. 2) seems to have been well understood by the Jews. We find them arguing, (John vii. 42,) “ Hath not the Scripture said, that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was ? ” They did not, however, understand the nature of his kingdom, or the object of his government. Had they known that he was to be a spiritual and not a temporal ruler, *Herod* would not have been *troubled, and all Jerusalem with him*.

7. *Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.*

8. *And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go, and search diligently for the young child ; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.*

Herod spoke these “words of peace, having war in his heart :” hoping in this way to discover the abode of the infant king, that he might destroy him. He was little aware that the safety of Christ was secured by a guardian who cannot be deceived. And so, likewise, is the safety of his people. “He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”

The twelfth verse acquaints us that God prevented the wise men from giving to Herod the information which he sought, and they departed home without returning to Jerusalem. This is one of the facts which fulfil the prophetic words of David, (Ps. ii. 2, 4,) “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh ; the Lord shall have them in derision.”

9. *When they had heard the king, they departed ; and lo, the star which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.*

10. *When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*

11. *And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him : and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts ; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.*

12. *And being warned of God in a dream, that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.*

In this narrative, an example is set us, which it is our duty to follow. God intimated the birth of his Son to the wise men, by a new appearance in the heavens. So, to us, a Redeemer is made known by early education, by the ministry of the word, by the Scriptures which we enjoy.

The philosophers of the east were not inattentive to the heavenly vision; but came to Jerusalem, *saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews?* Thus they made the birth of the Messiah their own personal concern: and that they might not be disappointed in their search, applied to those best able to instruct them. We are bound to do the same; we are bound to secure to ourselves, by a lively faith, that interest in Christ, which is covenanted to us by the privilege of our baptism. We hear his gracious offers, and must *come and worship him* as our Saviour and our Lord.

God does not leave unnoticed and unrewarded those who desire to discover his will, and comply with the suggestions of his Spirit upon their hearts. You observe how *the star which they had seen in the east*, appeared again to the wise men, as they pursued their search from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, *and went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.* This illustrates the way in which the "Spirit prevents us, that we may have a good will, and works with us when we have that good will."² The star which advertised

² Art. x.

these strangers of the birth of Christ, is like the Spirit warning us, as we hear or read the word, that the same Jesus is the author of eternal life to all them that obey him. Are our hearts awakened by this truth? do we desire to know him “of whom Moses and the prophets did write?” do we desire more fully to understand “what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance?”—Here again the star appears, and guides us on our way: “the eyes of our understanding” are gradually “enlightened;” and “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, gives unto us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.”³ The Spirit does not leave us, till it has conducted us safely to the Son of God: as the star did not desert the wise men, *till it came and stood over where the young child was.* “The mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh,” is more and more unfolded to us, and its wonderful adaptation to the circumstances and wants of our state, is more and more perceived, till we entirely and cordially receive him as “made unto us of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

Has the Spirit done this for you? Is he thus leading you? Has he brought you to acknowledge Christ as the author of your salvation, by whom you “have access to the Father?”

The history gives us one more lesson of instruction. The wise men *when they were come into the*

³ Eph. i. 17, 18.

house, and saw the young child with Mary his mother, fell down and worshipped him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. You must resemble them in this: you must offer him gifts; not once only, or when you first approach him; but constantly offer him, out of the treasure of your heart, the best gifts you have of active service and obedient love. These are the gifts which he requires, and this is the least return which you can pay—that the “life which you live in the flesh,” you should “live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved you, and gave himself for you.”

LECTURE III.

HEROD'S CRUELTY.—CHRIST CALLED A NAZARENE.

MATT. ii. 13—23.

13. *And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.*

14. *When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:*

15. *And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son.*

The passage alluded to occurs in Hosea xi. 1. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my Son out of Egypt." So God now loved his "only begotten Son, in whom he was well pleased:" and, as he delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt, so he delivered Christ from the dangers of the same strange land; and so he will deliver all the true members of that church, of which Christ was to be the Head, from the bondage and dangers of sin.

16. *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.*

No one can foresee the end of any worldly principle or passion, when allowed to have dominion. Herod's passion was the love of power; and when he conceived that his power was threatened, he determined to preserve it at all hazards, and by all means, lawful or unlawful. What reason we have for thankfulness, that God has not cast our lot in an age or country where cruelty like Herod's could be practised!

A lamentation was made then, in the scene of this barbarous wickedness, like that which had been made six hundred years before, when Jerusalem was destroyed, in the time of Jeremiah, and the prisoners were brought to Ramah. (See Jer. xl. 1.) Ramah was within the district of Bethlehem; therefore we are told,

16. *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,*

18. *In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.* (See Jer. xxxi. 15.)

The words of the prophet proceed, “Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.” And so it might be said on this occasion, *Refrain your voice from weeping, ye mothers of Bethlehem, and your eyes from tears; for your sorrow shall have a recompense: your children shall live again, in a land where they have no enemy.* They are taken from a world of sin and trial, into the presence of a merciful God. His goodness may be trusted, however dark the present dispensation may appear.

Shortly after the commission of that cruelty, by which he intended to preserve his life and his power, Herod died. We may turn aside the hand of man; but we cannot turn aside the universal decree, *Thou shalt surely die.*

19. *But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,*

20. *Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.*

21. *And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.*

22. *But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea, in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:*

23. *And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.*

Jesus, though born at Bethlehem, was generally considered as belonging to Nazareth ; because that being the residence of Joseph, his youth was passed there. Hence his followers were termed Nazarenes. Paul is accused by the orator Tertullus (Acts xxiv. 5) as a “ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.” Now Nazareth was a place held in general contempt, as we learn from the first question of Bartholomew to Philip : (John i. 46 :) “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth ?” And the *prophets had spoken* concerning Christ, that he should be “despised and rejected of men.” The Psalmist says of him, (Ps. lxix. 7, 8,) “For thy sake have I borne reproach ; shame hath covered my face. I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s children.” Therefore Joseph was directed in a dream to this ignoble place, that he for whom God hath designed a “name that shall be above every name,” might, in his earthly condition, accomplish the prophecy, “He was despised and we esteemed him not.” (Isaiah liii. 3.)¹

This leads to a natural reflection. “For thy sake have I borne reproach,” says the Lord of glory. Certainly for our sake he did undergo re-

¹ The reason may be seen in Whitby for adopting this interpretation, instead of referring the allusion to Judges xiii. 5, where it is said of Sampson, *he shall be a Nazarite* (separated, hallowed, ἡγιασμενος) unto God from the womb.

proach, who, "being in the form of God, yet made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. ii. 6—8.) Should *we* then hesitate to endure reproach for him, if we should be put to such a trial? If our zeal to serve what we believe to be his cause, or if our strict conformity to the spirit of his laws, should be unpopular, or lead to misrepresentation, shall we be disturbed, as if some strange thing had happened to us? Still less ought we to decline from the straight path of duty, through a vague apprehension of any such consequence, which probably may never arise.

The lesson to be learnt is, that both worldly honour and worldly reproach are as nothing in the sight of God; and that we should endeavour to think them nothing, but seek "the honour which cometh from God" only. It often happens that those who do seek that honour simply and consistently, are unexpectedly rewarded, in the end, by the good opinion of men. For "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."²

Enable us, O Lord, through "honour and dishonour, through evil report and good report," to lead the life which is approved by thee, and to "keep ourselves unspotted from the world."

² Prov. xvi. 7.

LECTURE IV.

PREACHING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

MATT. iii. 1—12.

(Mark i. 2. Luke iii. 2.)

1. *In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea,*

2. *And saying, Repent ye : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

3. *For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.¹*

4. *And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins ;² and his meat was locusts and wild honey.*

These habits of John are mentioned to show that he was a plain and austere man, mortified to this world and its delights and vanities. He “came neither eating nor drinking :” (ix. 18 :) he lived apart from the society and usual habits of his countrymen. This agreed with the business assigned to him, and the doctrine which he preached. All should be consistent. Exhortations to self-denial would come with little force from one who

¹ Is. xl. 3.

Such seems to have been the dress of the prophets. Elijah is described (2 Kings i. 8) as *a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins*. And Zechariah (xiii. 4) speaks of false prophets, who *wear a rough garment to deceive*.

was evidently himself attached to earthly things. Those who “seek first” *the kingdom of heaven* which the Baptist proclaimed, will strive to imitate him in his indifference to outward comforts and advantages, though they are not required to observe a like singularity.

5. *Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan,*

6. *And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.*

7. *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

8. *Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance :*

9. *And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father : for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*

10. *And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees : therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

11. *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance : but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear :³ he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire :⁴*

12. *Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner ; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

Such was the substance of John the Baptist's

³ “In eastern countries, on occasion of visits of great men, the sandals or slippers are usually pulled off at the door, and either left there, or given to a servant to bear ; therefore *to bear the shoes* of another, was to be his attendant, his inferior.”

⁴ With the Holy Ghost, (Mark i. 8,) whose operation shall be quick, powerful, and purifying as fire.

preaching, by which he awakened men to a sense of their danger and a concern for their souls ; that the Saviour might be welcome to them, when, a few months afterwards, he entered upon his ministry. “ Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

But the word of the preacher never profits, unless we take it to ourselves ; and Satan is always ready to satisfy our corrupt hearts with a reason why we should not take it to ourselves. The Jews trusted to the favour of God towards their nation ; and had a common saying, that no descendant of Abraham should finally perish. They are warned accordingly, *Think not to say among yourselves, We have Abraham to our father : for God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.* If he had need of a people to serve him, he could find or make one anywhere.

Christians too must beware lest they trust in their Christian name, their outward advantages, their pure church and its sacraments ; and so take a comfort to their hearts to which they have no scriptural claim.

The Jews were descended from Abraham : were “ a chosen nation, a peculiar people.” Yet unless they “ did the works of Abraham,” and lived as a holy nation, they had no exemption *from the wrath to come.* WE are called by the name of Christ, we belong to a Christian church : but unless we have more than this ; unless the faith and the Spirit of Christ reside in our hearts, he “ profiteth us nothing ; we are yet in our sins.”

Success attended John’s preaching, even beyond

his hopes. *When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

It was the "Lord's doing, and it was marvelous in his eyes." The Pharisees, he knew, were filled with self-righteousness, and seemed to themselves to "need no repentance." The Sadducees denied a resurrection, and could therefore dread no *wrath to come*. But God had touched these hearts by his grace, and many of them also *came to his baptism*. May our hearts continually feel the effect of the same sovereign power!

But John knew that the heart may be touched, yet not subdued. Men are often led by the talents of a preacher, or the example of others, to "receive the word with joy," who still "bring no fruit to perfection." It is one thing to feel the emotions of sorrow and alarm; but another thing to "overcome the world," and "endure unto the end, striving against sin." Therefore he adds, *Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance*. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation" has this object, that men should lead godly, righteous, and sober lives; such lives as are a preparation for heaven. He who will come at last to take account of every man's works, will use an awful scrutiny. *His fan⁵ is in his hand*, to distinguish between the wheat and the chaff in his church, and separate the one from the other. He will *thoroughly purge his floor*:—"gather out of his

⁵ For the same metaphor, see Isa. xli. 16; Jerem. xv. 7, and li. 2.

kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity :”—“ he will sift the house of Israel, like as corn is sifted in a sieve ;—yet shall not the least grain of it fall upon the earth :”⁶ not the least of those who have believed in him, and brought forth *fruits meet for repentance*, shall perish.

Lastly, the Baptist warns his hearers to avoid another snare, which often hinders the first efforts of repentance. The evil seems distant : too distant to be dreaded. But even while we are trusting to this, and delaying, the danger may be close at hand. *And now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees.* When *the axe is laid to the root of the tree* its destruction is nigh, and nothing but a change in the mind of him who lifts the axe, can save it. So at this moment destruction was near the Jewish nation, “even at the doors,” all thoughtless and unconscious as they were. And so, as death is always nigh to every individual, destruction is always nigh to every sinner. The axe is constantly at the root of every mortal man ; no one can tell when it may strike ; but every one may reckon that it must strike soon. See, therefore, that the tree is sound, and proving its soundness by its fruits : for *every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

⁶ Amos ix. 9.

LECTURE V.

BAPTISM OF JESUS.

MATT. iii. 13—17.

(Mark i. 9. Luke iii. 21.)

13. *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.*

14. *But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?*

It was part of the mysterious plan now about to be fulfilled for man's redemption, that Christ should remain unnoticed in the province of Galilee till this time, when he was "about thirty years of age." (Luke iii. 23.) So it had been written: "He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." (Is. liii. 2.)

The Baptist was aware who it was that now approached him; *and he forbad him* with these striking words, *I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?* As much as to say, I am performing an office which assumes superiority in character and authority;—God has made me "great in his sight;"—has given me such authority over my sinful brethren. But comest thou to me, who art not one of these, and hast no sins to confess and repent of? Again: comest thou to me, who *have need to be baptized of thee?* I have need to be baptized of thee, for thou art "the Lamb of God which takest away the sins of the world;" and I am one of that world of sinners.

“Among them that were born of woman there had not risen a greater than John the Baptist:” yet such was his humility. We had an example of it before, in his declaring to the people, *He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear.* He claims nothing: he even represses the homage paid to him.

And from that time to this it has been found, that those who possess the fullest measure of the Spirit of God, have been the first to see their need of more; that the best and holiest of men have had the deepest sense of their unworthiness; and have most cordially assented to the scripture, “which has concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” (Gal. iii. 22.)

Imprint, O Lord, this truth upon our hearts! Not only when we have transgressed against thee, but in the best works by which we strive to serve thee: *I have need to be baptized of thee.*

15. *And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.*

Our blessed Lord here, while he insists on what became him in his own peculiar character, leaves a record of the duty of mankind in general:¹ that they comply with all the commandments and ordi-

¹ He uses the plural, ἡμᾶς: in which form, it is observed, he never speaks of *himself*.

Various purposes were served by the baptism of our Lord. 1. A testimony was given to him from heaven, in a place of general concourse. 2. He added authority to the ministry and baptism of John. 3. He sanctified the rite of baptism by his example. 4. He bore himself the symbol by which others were to be initiated into his religion.—See Poole *in loco*.

nances of God. Whatever God ordains, is part of the *righteousness* which man is to *fulfil*. The baptism of John was an ordinance of God. In many respects it was not applicable to our Lord; for it was the "baptism of repentance," and accompanied by confession of sin. But it was a divine appointment at that time in force; therefore Christ complied with it, as he complied with the rite of circumcision.

Learn, from this example, to reverence God's ordinances, and to seek in them further communications of his grace. Do not neglect them, and pretend that they are not profitable. Though the benefit of baptism may not be perceived immediately; though an increase of grace may not always be experienced from attendance at the Lord's table; though you may fancy that the liveliness of your devotion is not heightened by "assembling yourselves together;" still they are divine ordinances, and *it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness*. The most advanced Christian will be the first to value them, and the most constant to observe them; otherwise he is not entitled to the character of an advanced Christian, but is wanting both in faith and humility.

16. *And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.*

17. *And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*

God gave this public testimony to Jesus, as he was now first entering upon the office for which he came into the world. *This is my beloved Son.*

He is the Son of God, because “he is of the Father alone; and because such as the Father is, such is the Son.”² He is the Son of God, for he had no human father. And he is the Son of God, because he is his “elect, in whom his soul delighteth.” (Is. xlii. 1.) This may satisfy us, without inquiring curiously into that which is inexplicable, the nature of the union of the Father with the Son.

What really concerns us, is the importance here ascribed to the work of redemption, in which all the three persons of the Trinity are interested and engaged. The Father sends “his only begotten Son, that all that believe in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.” The Son consents; and has just set the first example to mankind, that “it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” The Holy Ghost descends visibly upon him, and intimates in what power he came, and what virtue might be expected to attend his ministry, and to establish his religion. And all this for us men and for our salvation!” How great must be the value of the soul, in behalf of which so much was done!

We, who read the narrative, are the objects of this gracious interposition. Do we feel it as we ought? Strive daily to improve your sense of it, and exalt your gratitude by meditation and prayer. Contemplate the mercy of God, till his Spirit descends more and more upon you, and leaves his dove-like image upon your hearts—the emblem and characteristic of the religion of Christ, which is peace with God and meekness towards man.

LECTURE VI.

TEMPTATION OF CHRIST.

MATT. iv. 1—11.

(Mark i. 12. Luke iv. 1.)

1. *Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

It is taken for granted by St. Matthew, in this narrative, that those who read it should know who is meant and designated as THE DEVIL. And Scripture instructs us that the devil is an evil spirit, the great enemy of mankind, who is permitted to try their hearts by tempting them to disobey God, and “seek the pleasures of sin for a season.” At the beginning, he succeeded in beguiling Eve through his “subtilty,” and so brought the world under condemnation. He still endeavours to keep every individual in thralldom : to prevent their recovery to God, or to pervert them from the stedfastness of their obedience.

It formed a part of that mysterious plan of mercy now devised for the restoration of the world, that the Redeemer should be tried by the enmity of that evil spirit, whose works he came to destroy. Therefore *he was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness.*

2. *And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.*

3. *And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*¹

4. *But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*²

The mode of temptation employed here, is not unlike that used towards Eve, (Gen. iii. 1.) “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden.” *If thou be the Son of God, his beloved Son*, let a proof be seen of his favour. To shake our faith in God, is the first object of the spiritual enemy. How beautiful is the reply! *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* There is something more needful to man than the supply of his temporal wants. The worst famine, is “not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.” (Amos viii. 11.)

5. *Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,*

6. *And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*³

7. *Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*⁴

1 With regard to the manner in which this temptation was carried on, many inquiries might be raised, and nothing certain can be replied. It is among the things not clearly explained, and left to our faith.

² Deut. viii. 3.

³ Ps. xci. 11, 12.

⁴ Deut. vi. 16.

It is true, that this was written concerning the Christ;—and it is true, that many similar promises are written for the comfort of God's people: but to presume upon such protection, and expose ourselves to unnecessary dangers, either threatening to the body or perilous to the soul, would be to sport with the divine promises; to abuse mercy; to venture into sin, that grace might abound.

8. *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.*

9. *And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*

10. *Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan; ⁵ for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.⁶*

11. *Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.*

I was observing, that by the way in which he introduces the history of the temptation, the Evangelist implies that it formed a necessary part of the scheme of man's redemption. It was foreseen: it was appointed. "Then was Jesus *led up of the Spirit* into the wilderness." That Spirit which attended him always, now prompted him to retire

⁵ This Hebrew word signifies the opposer, the adversary. Both the Hebrew name, and the Greek Διὰβολος are taken from the malevolent nature of the evil spirit. Satan *the adversary*;—the devil, *the accuser* of mankind, (Rev. xii. 10,) the accuser of the "brethren, who accused them before God night and day."—See Job i. 6; Zech. iii. 1.

⁶ Deut. vi. 13, and x. 20.

from the company and the abodes of man, and to devote himself to prayer and fasting.⁷ And the purpose of this preparation was equally decreed. He “was led up into the wilderness *to be tempted of the devil.*”

We naturally ask, what made this trial necessary?

Our Lord was now entering upon his ministry; that ministry which should fulfil the original prophecy, and “bruise the serpent’s head.” The dominion of Satan had too long prevailed; he had earned the title of “god of this world,” “prince of this world;” men were led captive by him at his will. “The Son of God was manifested,” that he might break this sway; “might destroy the works of the devil.” But Satan, we must believe, was aware of this great purpose. Without doubt he would endeavour to counteract it. He knew that the “Word was made flesh, and was dwelling among” men, “in form and fashion as a man.” And as he had heretofore prevailed over flesh and blood, even though made “in the likeness of God,” after his image; so he might hope to prevail again, and retain the world in his own power. Blessed be God, greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world! Jesus showed himself incapable of sin, and invincible by Satan: and so began his ministry as the Saviour of mankind, by proving his superiority over the destroyer of mankind.

Another reason made this temptation necessary.

⁷ Luke. iv. 2.

Jesus had taken our nature upon him, not only that he might be able in that nature to offer a satisfaction for our sins ; but that having belonged to our nature, and been subject to our trials, he might become a fit and proper example to his followers of complete and victorious virtue. Now these, his followers, are exposed to the arts and seductions of Satan. He is emphatically “our adversary :” “going to and fro upon the earth, seeking whom he may devour.” (Job. i. 6 ; 1 Pet. v. 8.) We contend not, in our exertion for heaven, “against flesh and blood alone, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Eph. vi. 12.) Temptation “is common to man.” Therefore was the “Captain of our salvation made perfect,” not without temptation. And having been so tried, and having proved victorious in the conflict, he has left us an example, that we “resist the devil, and he will flee from us :” though still an enemy, he is a conquered enemy ; Christ has defeated and disarmed him ; and now encourages us with the comfortable reflection, that “we have not an High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are ; so that inasmuch as he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” (Heb. iv. 16 ; ii. 18.)

Blessed Lord ! enable us to go forth against the enemy of our souls, encouraged by thy example, and strengthened by thy power.

LECTURE VII.

MINISTRY OF JESUS.

CALLING OF SOME OF THE APOSTLES.

MATT. iv. 12—25.

12. *Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee ;*

13. *And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim :*

14. *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet,¹ saying,*

15. *The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles ;²*

16. *The people which sat in darkness saw great light ; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.*

17. *From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

Were these heathen, who are thus described as *sitting in darkness and the shadow of death*? On the contrary, they were part of that people which God had chosen for himself, who had “much advantage every way ;” for “unto them were committed the oracles of God.” (Rom. iii. 2.) But those who professed to be their teachers, neglected

¹ Is. ix. 1.

² *I. e.* bordering on the country of the Gentiles ; and on that account perhaps more corrupt, more truly a *land of darkness*, than other parts of Judea.

or deceived them : their own corrupt hearts “ loved to have it so : ” and they were sunk in ignorance and irreligion. And this is represented as darkness : *as the region and shadow of death*. They are on the verge of destruction ; its very cloud overhangs them ; yet this danger is concealed from their eyes, till a light shines upon them, the light of the gospel : bids them repent, *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* ; bids them review their ways, and directs them to “ the day star from on high,” which God has appointed “ to light every man that cometh into the world.” (John i. 9.)

May “ He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ! ” (2 Cor. iv. 6.)

(Mark i. 16—20 ; Luke v. 1—11.)

18. *And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea : for they were fishers.*³

19. *And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*

20. *And they straightway left their nets and followed him.*

21. *And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets ; and he called them.*

22. *And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.*

23. *And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.*

³ Mark. i. 16.

24. *And his fame went throughout all Syria : and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic; and those that had the palsy ; and he healed them.*

25. *And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.*

Multitudes, it appears, followed Jesus, attracted by his miracles and his discourses. Out of this crowd he selected, as his disciples, those whom he saw most fit for his purpose. "He called them." And such power of the Holy Ghost accompanied his call, that they immediately obeyed.

Do not however suppose, that in this call there was anything so peculiar, as to make it inapplicable to ourselves. We are not indeed invited, we should not commonly be permitted to relinquish our respective stations. But with this exception, the same call is made to every one of us. To us the Gospel speaks in the same tone of authority, as that in which Jesus addressed these men of Galilee; and there he himself commands us, "*Follow me.*" Believe me, as the true Messiah; receive me, as sent of God to redeem your soul; yield yourself up to me as your Lord; obey my commandments, and tread in my steps. Let no present interests delay you; come, leave all, and follow me. If there is anything sinful to which you are attached, leave it. If any worldly consideration stands in the way of duty, and prevents your "seeking first the kingdom of God," leave it, as you value your

salvation.—Such is the language which the gospel of Christ addresses to every living man.

But surely, you would think, there was something peculiar in the choice which selected these apostles out of the great multitudes who attended our Lord. From the many thousand persons in that land, who were of the same age and occupation, these were chosen to receive and to convey the tidings of redemption.

But so are we likewise the subjects of peculiar mercy. It is equally the gift of God's sovereign grace, that we are called by baptism to be his servants; that the means of grace, and the hope of glory, are set before us. How many millions, how many hundreds of millions are there in the world, to whom the names of Creator, of Redeemer, are unknown! And "who made us to differ" from these?

Still further. Of those who have been baptized in the name of Christ, are there not a fearful number, to whom, as far as we can judge, baptism has been a vain ceremony? who have never claimed the privilege of their birth? or even have "denied the Lord that bought them," and, by rejecting his commands, have "put him to an open shame?" If any of us, then, are in a happier state; if we have resolutely taken up the Saviour's yoke, and are daily desiring to learn his will, and to be led by his Spirit: if out of the many that are called, we may hope to be among the few that are chosen; to what shall we attribute this but to God's un-

deserved mercy towards us? Whatever holy desires we feel, or good counsel we follow, or just works we perform, they all, as we are early taught to acknowledge,⁴ “proceed from God:” and I am quite sure, that whoever has been blessed by the influence of the Holy Ghost, in putting “a new heart and a right spirit” within him, will join with St. Paul in saying, “By the grace of God I am what I am;” whoever has “mortified the flesh, with the affections and lusts,” and “set his affections on things above,” has “ceased to do evil, and learnt to do well,” in obedience to his Saviour’s precepts, will confess, nay thankfully avow, “yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

To him then ascribe the glory. “As it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” Every recollection of mercies received must have the effect of humbling us, when we compare what has been done for us with the poor return we have made. Let it also dispose us to seek an increase of grace, that we may prove ourselves sensible of the distinguishing mercy shown towards us, and walk more and more worthily of the vocation wherewith we have been called.

⁴ Second Collect for Evening Prayer.

LECTURE VIII.

THE BEATITUDES.

MATT. v. 1—12.

(Luke vi. 20—26.)

1. *And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain : and when he was set, his disciples came unto him :*
2. *And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,*
3. *Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

We are instructed in these sentences, who are the persons, and what are the characters, which we ought really to esteem as happy. Our Lord must not be understood as merely pronouncing a solemn *blessing* upon such and such qualities ; the word which he uses shows, that it was his intention to declare who among mankind are entitled to be described as *happy*. Let us then turn a deaf ear to the opinions of the world, which have not yet been brought into conformity with the opinions of Christ. Let us consider that “we are all here present before God,” to hear the truths which he has sanctioned ; to hear, upon the most important of all concerns, the declarations of a judgment which can neither deceive nor be deceived.

We are first assured, that *the poor in spirit are blessed* : the humble and lowly-minded ; for they are willing to seek the kingdom of heaven on the terms on which it is offered ; they are in the right frame of heart to receive the Saviour, and “ he

gives them power to become the sons of God." (John i. 12.) The too common sentiment of fallen man is that expressed in Revelation iii. 17, which says, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." The sentiment which the gospel inculcates is, Lord, we are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:" clothe us with the "white raiment" of thy righteousness, "that the shame of our nakedness do not appear." (Ibid. 17, 18.) Paul therefore was *blessed* when he exclaimed, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (1 Tim. i. 15.) This is the renewed or Christian state of mind; it "humbles itself in the sight of God." And therefore it is blessed; for God will "lift it up."

4. *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

The mourning here intended is not *any* sorrow; "the sorrow of the world worketh death." (See 2 Cor. vii. 10.) No blessing attends grief like that of Esau, who exclaims, (Gen. xxviii. 36,) "Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and behold, now he hath taken away my blessing."

But the mourning which is "blessed," is either "godly sorrow" properly so called; sorrow for having offended God by sin; or even sorrow which has a worldly source, if it "leads to repentance."

The mourning of David which is recorded in the fifty-first psalm, was blessed : he *was comforted* and restored to the Divine favour. The mourning of Manasseh was of a different origin, when “the king of Assyria bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.” But that too, was “blessed :” for it caused him to know that the Lord he was God. (See 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—13.) And he also *was comforted*. God “heard his supplication.”

In a religious view, any state is more hopeful than a light, self-complacent spirit, which passes through the world as if the only object was to banish serious thought or reasonable fear.

5. *Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth.*

Meekness is one of the qualities in which our Saviour’s own example is peculiarly suited for our imitation. He himself has enjoined us to “learn of him ; for he is meek and lowly of heart :” and his apostles have prescribed us the same lesson. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory ; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. ii. 3, 5.) Again, “This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For even hereunto were ye called : because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps : who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth : who, when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” (1 Pet. ii. 19—23.)

The promise here given to the meek may seem extraordinary ; for in a world of which the general character is, that “ all seek their own,” it may be thought that meekness is likely to miss its share. This, indeed, is not always the case ; meekness, as well as godliness, is sometimes found to have “ the promise of the life that now is.” The phrase, however, must be considered as a general assurance of blessing, taken from the language of the Old Testament, and referring to the land of promise, the land of Canaan.¹ And as Canaan was but a type of “ a better country, that is, a heavenly ;” so the blessing pronounced upon the meek, that they shall inherit the earth, may justly be extended to that land in which “ violence shall no more be heard, wasting nor destruction within its borders ; but they shall call its walls Salvation, and its gates Praise.” (Isa. lx. 18.)

6. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled.*

What it is to hunger and thirst after righteousness, cannot be better shown than in the conduct of Mary, the sister of Lazarus ; who, when our Lord had entered into her house, “ sat at his feet and heard his word.” Other things might have occupied her mind, and her sister was occupied with other things ; but the hunger and thirst after righteousness was uppermost in the breast of Mary, and she received an encouragement which explains the promise here : *they shall be filled* ; they shall be satis-

¹ Ps. xxxvii. 11. “ The meek shall inherit the earth ; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

fied ; they shall not hunger and thirst in vain, and more and more, as those commonly do whose desires are fixed upon earthly gratifications. “ Mary has chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke x. 39, 42.)

7. Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.

The parable of the unmerciful servant is the best comment on this verse ; we hear there the circumstances under which the Christian appears before God ; “ I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me.” And we see his corresponding obligation, “ Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee ?” (Matt. xviii. 32, 33.)

8. Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God.

In God, holiness and happiness are inseparably united ; and our Lord here reminds us, that in order to partake hereafter of heavenly happiness, we must here cultivate heavenly holiness. It has been declared from the first, “ Be ye holy, for I am holy.”

But are there any, who, looking into themselves, do not feel their need of a further purification, that they may *see God* ? A further purification is prepared : “ They that are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, have washed their robes, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev. vii. 14, 15.)

9. Blessed are the peace-makers : for they shall be called the children of God.

Dispute and contention, which can seldom exist without dislike and enmity, seem to be the element in which many delight to breathe. Hence they are

ready to stir them up in public and private, in church and state, by exaggeration, misrepresentation, and fierce recrimination. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” (James iii. 17.) May the “Prince of Peace” make us children of peace, and so prepare us for a kingdom where all shall be peace!

10. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake : for their's is the kingdom of heaven.*

11. *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake.*

12. *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

What was meant by *persecution for righteousness' sake*, soon became evident, when the apostles were beaten, and “commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus.” (Acts v. 40.) What it was to *be reviled*, we see in the case of Paul, whose enemies alleged, “We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world; and a ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes, who also hath gone about to profane the temple.” (Acts xxiv. 5.) From the same examples we may learn *to rejoice and be exceeding glad* in such persecution:—as the apostles did, who “departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” (Acts v. 41.) And St. Peter says, “If ye be reproached for the

name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." (1 Pet. iv. 14.)

These BEATITUDES are probably brought together here, and placed in the front of our Lord's discourse, in order to convey a just idea of the nature of his kingdom, and to correct the erroneous notions concerning it existing among the Jews.

They should be to us "for a sign upon our hand, and for a memorial between our eyes:"² for the characters here enumerated are those on which eternal wisdom has pronounced a sentence of happiness: in proportion, therefore, as they are found in us, we may be esteemed happy, for in that proportion we are partakers of Christ's kingdom.

Do thou, Lord, make us that which without thee we never can become, in order that we may enjoy that which without thee we never can obtain!

LECTURE IX.

CHRISTIANS THE SALT AND THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.—RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE PHARISEES.

MATT. v. 13—20.

13. *Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

² Ex. xiii. 9

14. *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

15. *Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick ; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*

16. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

The disciples of our Lord more immediately surrounded him on this occasion : but we must remember that they were the representatives of all future Christians ; and that his words are no less applicable to us than to them.

His expressions are intended to prepare their minds for a lofty standard of practice. He raises their ideas towards the commanding station which they were to occupy, by several striking examples. He calls them *the salt of the earth* ; that which is to purify it and keep it from corruption. The Jewish people, in one sense, had been this already ; they had the knowledge of the Creator ; “unto them were committed the oracles of God :” but *the salt had lost its savour*, and was now fit for nothing but to be *cast out*.

Again, he calls them *the light of the world*. He is himself the “true light of the world :” they were to reflect his light, and to show it to mankind. They were *as a city set on a hill* ; they could not be, and ought not to be, *hid* ; he was not to instruct and illuminate them, that they might remain unperceived among the ignorant, and careless, and corrupt multitude ; that would be as if *men were to light a candle, and to hide it, when lighted, under*

a bushel. Their *light must shine before men*, who, seeing the innocence and excellence of their lives, might be led themselves, by seeking and walking in the same faith, to glorify their heavenly Father.

The disciples of Christ were at that time a small number among a multitude, and therefore would be conspicuous. The faithful disciples of Christ are still a small number, in comparison of the “many” who “are called,” but neglect his laws; it is equally needful for them to shine as examples of purity, integrity, meekness, industry, moderation, and every virtue which is acceptable to God and approved of men. Where else should we look for these things? “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”

17. *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.*

18. *For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle³ shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*

19. *Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven ; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

Christ had been now long enough engaged in teaching, that reports concerning him should be spread abroad ; and, doubtless, many things were stated, partly true and partly false. Among them,

³ “ Alluding probably to the little strokes or dashes by which the difference was made in Hebrew and Syriac writings between letters almost alike.”—*Lightfoot ap. Mant and D'Oyley.*

perhaps, some might affirm that he was come to set aside *the law*: to introduce a new doctrine which should contradict Moses and the prophets. This notion was mistaken, and he corrects it: *I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.* To fulfil the prophetic declarations; to confirm the moral law, a law which is founded on the unchangeable will of God; and as such, is so important, that *whosoever shall break one of the least of these commandments*, and either by his words or his example *shall teach men* to do the same, as the scribes and Pharisees had done by their unwarrantable traditions, he shall be counted unworthy of the kingdom of heaven.

20. *For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

Here something is proposed to the Christian, which may lead him to a useful train of self-inquiry. Our *righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees*: must be of a better and purer nature. Let us think, then, what theirs was; in what it fell short; in what it was mistaken.

The Pharisees were very strict in observing the exact letter of *the law*. They kept the sabbath, for instance, most rigorously. When our Lord's disciples plucked some ears of corn and rubbed them out on that day, they inquired, "Why do your disciples that which is not lawful on the sabbath-day?" When the sick and diseased, naturally fearful of losing an opportunity, were brought by

their friends on the sabbath to seek cures from our Lord, "the ruler of the synagogue said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath-day." (Luke xiii. 14.)

Further, they assumed a great appearance of holiness. They "fasted often:" they prayed constantly: even in public, "in the midst of the synagogues, and standing at the corners of the streets." They showed so much reverence for the Scriptures, that sentences from them were embroidered upon their garments, or worn upon their foreheads.⁴ They are said never to have passed a day without reading through the decalogue. They were so scrupulous in outward ceremonies, as never to sit down to meat with unwashed hands.⁵ They were so strict in giving God his due, as to bring to the sacred treasury the tithes even of the meanest herbs of the garden.⁶

Such was their righteousness. And let us not suppose that for this righteousness they were blamed. Rather let those take warning, who have not even this outward righteousness. They could not be blamed for the strict observance of the sabbath; for this had been positively required by Moses: and God has uniformly declared his approbation of those who keep the sabbath holy. They could not be blamed for their fasting: for it is a good thing to bring the body into subjection. Still less could they be blamed for their prayers; for prayer is the chain which connects man with God and earth with heaven. Neither could they

⁴ See Matt. xxiii. 5. ⁵ Matt. xv. 1, 2. ⁶ Matt. xxiii. 23.

be blamed for the exactness with which they paid whatever the law required ; indeed our Lord tells them, “ This ought ye to have done.”

What then, we are ready to ask, was wanting to their righteousness ? *That* was wanting, on which the whole of religion depends—the heart : the heart converted to God ; the right spirit. What they did was directed by no love of God, no desire of pleasing him, no zeal for his service or glory. It was either hypocrisy, or self-love : and done with a desire to be thought highly of among men, to procure to themselves the honour of superior sanctity. “ They disfigured their faces, that they might appear unto men to fast.” They “ sounded a trumpet before them” when they gave their alms ; took care that it should be generally known. They “ for a pretence made long prayers.”

Such is the reason why the righteousness of those who are really the servants of God, must “ *exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.*” It must be dictated by the love of God.

But a further lesson is to be derived from this instructive passage. What shall we think of those who have not even this insufficient and unsatisfactory righteousness ? The Pharisees were condemned, because they observed the sabbath for form’s sake alone. What will become of those who do not at all “ remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy ?” The Pharisees were condemned, because they fasted, not to mortify the flesh and the deeds of the body, but to be admired of men. What will become of those who never deny themselves any thing, and

think it no duty to restrain their appetites? The Pharisees were condemned, because for a show they made long prayers. What will be the end of those who never pray at all?

Try yourselves, then, and examine what is in your hearts. Try yourselves as to the services and exercises of religion. What brings you to them? A desire to make a decent appearance in the sight of men? A desire to quiet conscience by a compliance with the outward form of duty? Or a desire to praise God, to pray to God, to hear his word, and learn better how to serve him? That is the only spirit which proves the heart to be really right with God. No mere form of righteousness will avail with him who "trieth the very heart and reins." No lip-service will satisfy him who complained of his people of old, "These people honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me." Search and prove yourselves: or rather pray with David, Do thou "try me, O Lord, and examine my heart, and see if there be any way of wickedness in me." However painful it may be to have our peace interrupted now, it will be far worse at last to hear the awful words, "Depart from me, I never knew you."

LECTURE X.

ANGER, ENMITY, AND EVIL THOUGHTS FORBIDDEN.

MATT. v. 21—30.

21. *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill ; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment :*

22. *But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment ; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca,¹ shall be in danger of the council ; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.²*

The disciples had been before told, “Your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the

¹ Raca, a Hebrew word, probably a common term of reproach, representing an empty, worthless person.

² “The different courts of justice, and the different kinds of punishment in use among the Jews, are supposed to be referred to in these expressions. By one court, it is said, the criminal was condemned to be beheaded ;—This answers to the *judgment* : by another stoned ;—this answers to the *council* : and by another, burned in the valley of the son of Hinnom, which was considered as a sort of type or emblem of the fire of hell. In that valley idolaters had been used to burn their children to Moloch ; and after this abominable practice was stopped, the place was by every means rendered as filthy and vile as possible, and a fire was there constantly burning to consume the rubbish carried thither ; and at length, it is reported that it became a place of execution for criminals. Hence, this place being so many ways execrable, it came to be translated to signify the place of the damned, as the most accursed, execrable, and abominable of all places. The word

scribes and Pharisees." Our Lord proceeds to instance several particulars: "Thou shalt not kill;" "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Of the heinousness of such crimes there was no doubt; they had been forbidden from the first by the law of God. But it had been overlooked by the expounders of that law, that the guilt consists not only in the last and worst act, but in all the steps which have led to it, or in the state of mind which has been disposed to it, even though the actual crime may never have been committed. Anger *without a cause*, violent and reproachful words,—are often the approaches to murder, and always signs of a state of heart most reprehensible in the sight of God. We read in Genesis, (iv. 4, 5,) that "the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell." At that moment there was in Cain's heart the same spirit which soon afterwards burst out, when "they were in the field, and Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." Had any outward hindrance checked his *hand*, the jealous, envious, malicious *heart* would have equally condemned him; and it is vain to apply restraint to the one without correcting the other. There are *degrees*, no doubt, in the sinfulness of

is gehenna; and is frequently used in the New Testament, and always for hell, or the place of final punishment and misery."—*Scott, after Mede*. "Tempore Christi apparet receptum fuisse loquendi morem, nec ferè aliter tunc vocatum fuisse infernum, quam gehennam, voce a nativo sono paululum deflexâ."—*Calvin*.

the angry passion ; so our Lord implies in his allusion to the Jewish courts of justice ; but no degree of them is to be cherished or allowed.

23. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee ;

24. Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

25. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him ; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

26. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

The only way of subduing the evil passions of envy, hatred, and malice, is to repress every hostile feeling in the first bud. Even acts of religious duty, however needful, are not so urgent as this ; and till this is done, are displeasing rather than acceptable to God. It was an act of duty to *bring a gift to the altar* ; Moses had commanded, (Deut. xvi. 16,) “Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose ; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles : and they shall not appear before the Lord empty ; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee.” This, then, was an appointed, acknowledged duty. But ill-will, rankling at the heart, would corrupt all : “for if a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen ?” How can

he entertain that humble, lowly spirit which befits a sinner in the presence of his Judge, a creature in the worship of his Creator, while towards his brethren on earth he cherishes a malicious, unrelenting disposition ?

What then is to be done ? Must the feeling remain, and excuse the neglect of God ? as is sometimes implied in the reasons which men plead for absenting themselves from the Church, or from the Lord's table ? The way of duty is very different. *First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* But be reconciled without delay ; common worldly prudence requires us to *agree with an adversary quickly* ; we know the consequences which follow obstinate and persevering hostility, even in this world ; it often involves men in difficulties from which they endeavour to extricate themselves in vain. How much more serious is delay, when every day, during which you cherish an unforgiving temper, increases your condemnation before God ? If thou fallest within the verge of his wrath, how shalt thou escape ? Thou hast nothing at all to pay, and yet *the uttermost farthing* shall be required. If *man* is our adversary, prudence warns us to seek a timely reconciliation. Let this remind us how dreadful it would be to remain with *God* for our adversary. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

27. *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery.*³

28. *But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a*

woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Here our Lord points out another instance in which men are not free from guilt, unless they watch against the motions of sin in the heart. We must restrain our desires ; we must bridle our thoughts ; we must “ make a covenant with our eyes ;” we must abstain from all incentives to sin ; we must avoid all such company as might ensnare us into it ; all such places as might prove a temptation to it. By caution and vigilance of this kind we may escape the snares of the evil one ; and it appears from the sentences which follow, that this must be done, at whatever sacrifice or pains.

29. *And if thy right eye offend thee,⁴ pluck it out and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

30. *And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

With these awful words before their eyes, will any dare to plead the strength of passion, or the power of habit, or the force of temptation, as an excuse for continuance in known and open sin ? These pleas might be listened to if the danger were less urgent, or the risk less terrible. But hesitation is impossible. We must consent to amputation, or expect death. The wages of allowed sin is death, eternal death. “ For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor co-

⁴ Or do cause thee to offend. Mark ix. 47.

vetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words ; for because of these things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience.” (Eph. v. 5, 6.)

“Teach us, O Lord, the way of thy statutes ; and we shall keep it unto the end. Turn away our eyes from beholding vanity ; and quicken thou us in thy way.” (Ps. cxix. 33, 37.)

LECTURE XI.

DIVORCEMENT.—SOLEMNITY OF OATHS.— SUBMISSION TO INJURIES.

MATT. v. 31—42.

31. *It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.*

32. *But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery ; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery.*

Another case is here specified, in which the allowed practice of the Jewish nation was either a perversion of their law, or altogether contrary to it. Moses had permitted marriage, under certain circumstances, to be dissolved. (Deut. xxiv. 1—4.) In consequence, divorces on the most frivolous pretences had now become disgracefully frequent. Our Lord corrects this evil by bringing things back

to the original regulation : “ for in the beginning it was not so.” Moses had relaxed the rule “ for the hardness of men’s hearts.”¹ Christ commands a man to cleave unto his wife, and not to separate himself from her except on the legitimate grounds of infidelity.

33. *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.*

34. *But I say unto you, Swear not at all ; neither by heaven ; for it is God’s throne :*

35. *Nor by the earth ; for it is his footstool : neither by Jerusalem ; for it is the city of the great King.*

36. *Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.*

37. *But let your communication be, Yea, yea, Nay, nay ; for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.*

These words expose another error of the scribes, who explained away the third commandment, confining it to the letter and neglecting the spirit. They maintained, that as long as the name of God was not actually introduced, the commandment was not broken, provided a man kept clear of perjury. Thus perverting Numb. xxx. 2 : “ If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word ; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.”

Christ sweeps away at once all vain excuses ; *Swear not at all.* Let your communications be plain and simple, *yea, yea, nay, nay.*

Because of the strictness of these words, one

¹ See Mark x. 2—9.

sect of Christians refuses to employ an oath even for the solemn purposes of a court of justice. Such scruples, when sincere, deserve respect ; and certainly we should be able to give good reasons why we admit a practice which seems contrary to the literal terms of scripture. There are cases, however, when we are led to do so, “comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” This appears to be one of such cases.

Because, first, it was allowed, nay commanded by the law of God himself, that matters should be solemnly settled by an oath taken of the parties. Instances may be found in Exodus xxii. 11, and 1 Kings viii. 31.

Secondly. Because, under the law, we read frequently of oaths being solemnly required and given, by those too who were governed by the especial direction of God ; and this practice is nowhere reprobated, or said to have been followed by the Divine displeasure. See Joshua ii. 12, 17 ; 1 Kings ii. 42, 43 ; 2 Kings xi. 4 ; Nehem. v. 12.

Thirdly. Because, under the gospel, the example of St. Paul proves that the serious invocation of God’s name is not unlawful. See 2 Cor. i. 23 ; 1 Thess. ii. 5.

These reasons show that our Lord is here speaking of the light and wanton use of sacred words ; and that we may without scruple or grief of conscience, comply with those laws of our country which require us, on certain occasions, to ratify our declarations upon oath. It is, however, an evil much to be lamented, when such oaths are unnecessarily or rashly multiplied, and mixed up with

the concerns of trade and commerce and the transactions of ordinary life. The grounds on which our Lord condemns the mode of swearing which had become habitual among the Jews, show that an appeal to God is only to be made with great solemnity and reverential awe. Let all be on their guard, that they do not acquire habits of expression of the same kind, and introduce sacred words into common discourse, without meaning perhaps, but for ~~that~~ very reason not without profaneness. This cannot be done where the state of mind is safe, because it cannot be done where there is a proper sense of God, and of the soul, and of eternity.

If men obey the Christian precept, "Lie not one to another;" a bare affirmative, *yea, yea*, a bare denial, *nay, nay*, would universally satisfy. Any thing beyond this, *cometh of evil*: cometh of the deceit which is in our hearts, and the falsehood which is in our practices, which make men distrustful of one another.

(Luke vi. 29—42.)

38. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth :*

39. *But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil ; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

40. *And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.*

41. *And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.²*

² The officers of public magistrates sometimes did this, pressing into their service the persons whom they met, their horses or carriages, for expedition sake.

42. *Give to him that asketh thee; and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.*

The law of Moses enacted, that “if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour, as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth:” (Levit. xxiv. 19; see also Ex. xxi. 24, 25.) This was appointed, not as private vengeance to the injured persons, but as a legal punishment to the offender. Perhaps, however, it was perverted, as if to justify a desire of retaliation. If so, the spirit of the Jewish law condemned it no less than the Christian; which says, “Thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord.” (Levit. xix. 18.) Again, “Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee.” (Prov. xx. 22.) At all events, our Lord takes the opportunity of showing, that the forgiveness, not the prosecution of injuries, must be the character of his disciples: they must rather yield to evil than resist it; for “charity endureth all things:” they must rather resign a claim, than urge it to the utmost; for “charity seeketh not her own:” instead of being sensibly alive to every encroachment, they must “overcome evil with good.”

Such is the general rule. Public justice, public duty, and, in many cases, important private interests, must of course make exceptions to the letter of these rules. Christ himself appealed to the law, against the injustice with which he was smitten: “One of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou

the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John xviii. 22.) And St. Paul thought it not inconsistent with his Christian patience to ask, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (Acts xxii. 25.) So likewise, with respect to alms-giving, the same apostle proves to us, that this duty is intended to have limits, and to be practised with such discretion as not to injure the morals of individuals, or the welfare of the community, when he lays down a general maxim, that every man should "eat his own bread," and that "if any will not work, neither shall he eat." (2 Thess. iii. 10—12.) Still it is certain, that expressions strong like these—*resist not evil: let thy cloak be taken from thee: yield to those who compel you unjustly: give to him that asketh thee*—expressions like these would not be used, if the danger were not the other way, namely, that we should be too impatient when suffering wrongfully, too eager to seek compensation, too zealous in maintaining supposed rights, and too apt to look about for reasons why we should refuse to "*give it to him that asketh.*"

What need have we for constant circumspection and prayer, that our spirit and our practice may be "peaceable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy!"

LECTURE XII.

FORGIVENESS OF ENEMIES REQUIRED IN
CHRISTIANS.

MATT. v. 43—48.

43. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.*

44. *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you :*

45. *That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*

The words, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, are found in Leviticus xix. 18. It would have been strange indeed, if the second clause, *thou shalt hate thine enemy*, had made a part of any general law proceeding from God. How little then were the scribes and Pharisees to be trusted, who thus perverted divine truth by their traditions! How truly were they called, “blind guides!”

But I say unto you, love your enemies. This too is required in the Old Testament. “If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.” (Ex. xxiii. 4, 5.) Our Lord points it out as the characteristic duty of his religion. He came not to destroy the moral rules which had been before laid down : but he takes the most important precepts of the law of Moses, which the Pharisees had kept out

of view, and brings them forward. He himself set the first example of the spirit which he here prescribes, when he prayed in behalf of those who had hurried him to execution, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."¹ His disciple Stephen followed him with a similar petition, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."²

It may be asked, perhaps, how *can* we comply with this precept? To love our friends is easy: but to love our enemies is unnatural. The answer is, that we must take means with ourselves to overcome the feelings of dislike, or the impulse of passion. We must not dwell upon the malice which others have shown: we must not make it the subject of discourse and complaint. We must call to mind all the excuses that may be found for them. We must, above all, pray for a forgiving spirit: pray that a sense of God's mercy, and of the goodness of Christ, may be so fixed and rooted in our hearts, that they may expand in love to all mankind. Thus *ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven*. Such are the grounds of this temper and conduct.

And one great motive to it is, that this is the way in which God acts towards men; and therefore the way in which men ought to act towards one another. God sends the blessings of his providence upon all; *upon the just and the unjust*: upon those that serve him, and those that serve him not. We have daily experience that he does. For what a spectacle is this world! In arms against God, their righteous governor; refusing his laws, op-

posing his dominion. Even in a country like ours, so particularly enjoying the means of grace, how small is the number of those who really live to his glory! Every trifle amuses, employs, engages them, and God is forgotten. Worse still, he is defied: defied by open sin; by cursing; by blasphemy. Yet God, though "strong," is "patient;" though "provoked every day," he does not bring down that vengeance upon his enemies which they incur, or even call down upon themselves. He bears long with them: so long indeed, that men are emboldened to continue in their wickedness, instead of profiting by God's mercy as he intended. "The long-suffering of God leadeth to repentance." "Sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily." He "is not willing that any should perish:" and therefore *he makes his sun to shine upon the evil and upon the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and on the unjust.* This thought should incline all Christians to *bless those that persecute them, to pray for those who despitefully use them.* A blessing often accompanies such a spirit of meekness: as was signally exemplified on an occasion which deserves to be recorded, when the simple prayer of a negro slave for his master, which the master unexpectedly overheard, was the means of converting his heart "from the power of Satan unto God."

In all this, however, nothing unreasonable is required: we are not expected to cherish sentiments which it is impossible we should command. The natural inclination of man would lead him to "re-compense evil for evil." Against this the divine

injunction is directed, and demands, that we “overcome evil with good.” We are not enjoined to seek out our enemies as our chief companions; but to be benevolent, instead of revengeful, towards them.

Such indeed is the example set before us for imitation. *Our Father which is in heaven: maketh his sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust:* he bestows his common and ordinary blessings upon all alike. But for his faithful servants, for *the good, the just*, he does this, and more also; he has a greater treasure of mercies in store for them: for the promise is, “If any man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” So the Christian loves all men, “honours all men,” as the creatures of his God, “made in his own image;” but this does not hinder his *especially* loving those who are united to him by the peculiar ties of kindred, obligation, similar sentiments, or reciprocal affection.

46. *For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?*

47. *And if you salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?*

48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

This passage indisputably requires, that the sincere and earnest servants of Christ should be known from others by a different course of conduct. *The publicans*—those who professed nothing, and of whom nothing was expected, are ready to assist

and benefit their friends and relations. And if the disciples of Christ were to do nothing more, for what purpose are they called, and justified, and sanctified? What proof is there that they have “put off the old man, and been renewed in the spirit of their mind?”

We learn from this, how dangerous it is to make common practice a rule for ourselves. When the question is asked, *What do ye more than others?* nature is ready to reply, *What should we* do more than others? But, evidently, more is expected. The laws of the master must be the rules of the master’s family; not those which may be observed elsewhere. “Be ye holy, for I am holy;” be ye patient, for I am patient; be ye merciful, for I am merciful. So ye may prove yourselves the *children of your Father which is in heaven*. The child is to do more in obedience to the father than strangers; he is to be more active in service, more devoted in love. If we are no better than “the children of this world” in our character and conduct, we shall be no better in our everlasting condition. If we expect to rise beyond others in glory, we must go beyond others here on earth in obedience. Nay, we are *to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect*. We are to set before us this example of supreme excellence; we are to “be followers of God, as his dear children;” to be as merciful, as forgiving, as desirous to benefit others, as God himself is, the author of all good things.

This is what we are required to do. Yet how prone are our hearts to act otherwise! Even the

disciples were willing to draw down “fire from heaven” against their adversaries, till their Lord warned them, “Ye know not what spirit ye are of.” Learn, therefore, to pass by in silence reproachful language, instead of rendering “railing for railing;” try to forget insults and evil falsely spoken, instead of cherishing the injury in your minds. Aspire after the praise which belonged to a great man of former times, concerning whom it was currently said, that whoever desired to receive a benefit from him, might become sure of it by first doing him an injury.

Divine grace alone can enable us to maintain this exalted temper. Implore the aid of the Holy Spirit, that ye may “walk as Christ walked;” may show that kindness, that forgiveness towards others, which he has shown towards you, and which you desire and hope to find when standing before the judgment-seat of God.

LECTURE XIII.

HYPOCRISY IN ALMS AND PRAYER EXPOSED. THE LORD'S PRAYER.

MATT. vi. 1—15.

1. *Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them : otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.*

2. *Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

3. *But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth :*

4. *That thine alms may be in secret : and thy Father which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.*

These words exposed further the hypocrisy of those who were admired in that day as patterns of righteousness. Their object was, to have the praise of men : and as alms-giving is naturally a popular thing and commands applause, they would argue, that meaning to be well spoken of, they must be ready to distribute ; but, at the same time, contrive that what they gave should be no secret, otherwise they would lose the return which they were seeking. Therefore, said our Lord, *the hypocrites sound a trumpet before them in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be seen of men.*

Now how will the Christian feel in this matter ? What St. John says will be an actuating principle within him : “ Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him ? ” Therefore he will make it a regular part of his expenditure, to give, according to his ability, in whatever way he deems most really beneficial to his fellow-creatures. But this will not be blazoned abroad. Few will be aware of it. *His left hand will not know what his right hand doeth.* God alone will see that he holds himself as a steward who must give account

of the talents entrusted to him, and that the only reward he looks for, is the favour of his *Father which seeth in secret*.

Still it may be very proper, that a Christian's liberality should be public, and *seen of men*. All depends upon the intention. If the object is present applause, present applause will be the sole reward. If the object is the glory of God, the charity will be either public or private, according as God is likely to be glorified by it most successfully.

5. *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are ; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

6. *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

The hypocrisy which is here exposed, though still common in the East, is so unlike the manners of our time and country, that we might seem to be in no danger of a like error. Consider, however, what the error is. It is the performance of religious duties for the sake of appearances, and not out of a feeling of religion. Religious feeling takes a man to his closet ; where he shuts the door against the world and worldly business, and communes with himself and God alone. Religious feeling will also take a man to the public worship of God : but it is possible that he may be carried thither by other motives : and is there no reason to fear, among ourselves, that the attendance at church, or at sacra-

ment, of many persons, is chiefly a wish to *be seen of men*; a compliance with custom, a mode of maintaining decent respectability.

How gracious is the accompanying promise! How encouraging to fervent prayer, whether in public or private services! *Thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.* Prayer is our privilege, as well as our duty: and yet the exercise of our privilege is followed by a reward.

7. *But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

8. *Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*

9. *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

10. *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.*

11. *Give us this day our daily bread.*

12. *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

13. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

14. *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:*

15. *But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Our Lord had before said, "First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." And now he says, "Forgive men their trespasses, as you hope to be yourselves forgiven."

And having described the temper in which prayer must be offered, he leaves us a form of prayer, both for our use and our imitation. *After*

this manner pray ye. Consider, therefore, the meaning of this prayer; the thoughts it expresses; the nature of its petitions.

Our hearts are first raised towards the majesty of him whom we are addressing, *Our Father, which is in heaven*: and we are reminded, what ought to be our chief desire, that his authority should be recognized, his holy name adored. *Hallowed be thy name!*

Thy kingdom come!

This is not the first thing which men, of their own accords, would be inclined to pray for. But, happy indeed would it be, if his kingdom were universal on earth; if he, who “ruleth over all,” were acknowledged by all as ruler! Then they might be able to look forward, with more scriptural hope, to the coming of his heavenly kingdom.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This earth would, comparatively, resemble heaven, if the will of God were followed in it. The transgression of his will is the chief cause of the misery which abounds. The whole creation groaneth under the effects of sin. Let it be our desire, at least, to pay that obedience, and to be employed in that service here, which is the distinguishing happiness of angels above.

Give us this day our daily bread.

“Our heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him.” Still he “will be inquired of” by his people. But while we seek the supply of temporal wants, let Him see, who sees the heart, that “a famine of bread in the land”

is far less dreaded by us, than “of hearing the word of the Lord.”

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.

We are, then, trespassers: we need forgiveness. Our hearts must be ill-instructed in the divine law, if they do not tell us that it is so. And he who lives through mercy, must show mercy. An unforgiving spirit would mar the effect even of this Christian prayer, because it would betray a most unchristian state of mind.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

There are temptations which “are common to men.” We see throughout all Scripture, that it is God’s will that his people should be tried. But who, that knows his frailty, and the infirmity of his best purposes, will not pray that he may be kept from temptation, and delivered from the evil one?

If these petitions are granted, it will be the Lord’s doing. To his name be all the praise, *For thine, O Lord, is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*

LECTURE XIV.

HYPOCRITICAL MORTIFICATION. THE RIGHT DIRECTION OF THE HEART.

MATT. vi. 16—23.

16. *Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance ; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

17. *But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face ;*

18. *That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret : and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

These verses introduce us to another species of hypocrisy—outward mortification. The hypocrite knows that there is a disposition to admire one who appears to be above the world, and to despise what others value. People shall perceive, said the Pharisee, that I am not like themselves. I fast thrice in the week : I put sackcloth on my limbs, and ashes on my head. They will respect these signs of mourning and penitence : they will be astonished at so much holiness and self-denial.

Strange as this particular kind of vain glory may appear to us, it is not unnatural, as the practice of the Faquirs and other devotees in India may still testify. The ages are different, and the countries distant ; but corrupt nature is still the same

Let us now consider what the Christian's behaviour would be, in this same particular of self-denial. In the course of his conflict against sin dwelling within him, he might find by experience, that the indulgence of one appetite provoked another: and that the more he restrained his bodily inclinations, and refused to gratify them, the better he was able to serve God in all things, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Therefore he might determine with himself to *fast: i. e.* to eat sparingly, and of the simplest things: such as are least likely to provoke a sinful thought or action. Or he might regulate himself according to a rule which has been recommended by eminent Christians, and "deny himself" in something every day; on the principle of the apostle, where he says, "All things are lawful for me; but I will not be brought under the power of any:" I will not make them necessary to me. But this would be a matter between himself and God; his nearest friend would not be aware of it: much less would he proclaim it to the multitude. *Thou, when thou fastest,* (our Lord seems to imply that self-denial is essential to his disciples,) *anoint thy head and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret.* He who seeth in secret, will, at the day of account, lay open much hypocrisy which had here, perhaps, received unmerited applause, and will reward concealed acts of piety and charity.

Let it be our care so to live, that we may rejoice in knowing, that our heavenly Father does *see in*

secret. And it will prove so if we keep this world in the right place, that is, in the lowest place, and make a heavenly inheritance our chief concern. Then neither credit nor reproach will affect us unduly; credit will not elevate, nor reproach depress. Our business is with our heavenly Father; and our object according to the precept which follows, “glory, and honour, and immortality.”

19. *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal :*

20. *But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal :*

21. *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

22. *The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.*

23. *But if thine eye be evil, thine whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !*

The purpose of these precepts is, to warn us against allowing any earthly thing to be the main object of our lives. The lover of pleasure; the ambitious man; the man whose grand concern it is to advance himself or his family: all these *lay up their treasures* on earth, as much as he who covets riches. If our heart is so earnestly set upon any of these things, that we seek them more diligently than we seek heaven, then they are our treasure; and if they are our treasure, the principle of our life is wrong, and we are following an object which leads to disappointment and ends in death.

This is taught by an example. *The light of the body is the eye*; the eye leads and directs the motions of the body; and what the eye is to the body, such is, to the man, the ruling desire of the heart; the principle of action. *If the eye be evil*, fails or misleads, *the whole body is full of darkness*; so, if the principle of action be wrong, the whole conduct of life is wrong.

Therefore, if it is the principle of a man's life to *lay up treasures on earth*, to set his affections there, *the light in him is darkness*; he works by a wrong rule, he "labours for that which satisfies not;" he will find himself deceived at the last. *How great is that darkness* which misleads the whole life!

But *if his eye is single*, if his first object be that which the gospel prescribes, to *lay up treasures in heaven*, then his *whole body shall be full of light*: this principle will reduce all the concerns and affairs of life into proper order, and show them in their true colours, their real magnitude.

The rich worldling, in the parable, betrayed his ruling principle when he said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."¹ Such was the light he followed; and how soon it ended in darkness! "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

St. Paul, on the other hand, showed a very different principle: (Acts xx. 23 :) "The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things

¹ Luke xii. 17—19.

move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”

Surely his *whole body was full of light*. He had “set his affections on things above, not on things on the earth.” And “his life was hid with Christ in God.”

LECTURE XV.

RELIANCE ON GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL CARE.

MATT. vi. 24—34.

24. *No man can serve two masters ; for either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*¹

In the verses which precede this, our Lord has strongly urged the necessity of seeing and pursuing our real interest in life, and laying up treasure which should never fail. Here he warns us, that this must be done simply and decidedly ; he shows, by an unanswerable example, that we cannot serve this world and the next together. We must as

² Mammon is a Syriac word, signifying money or gain.

surely set before ourselves a leading object, as a man must choose a certain master. *No man can serve two*, without, at times, deserting one of them.

The heart of the worldly man often deceives him in this. He flatters himself that he is only paying a necessary attention to things on earth, and that he is still "laying up treasure in heaven." But occasions must arise when the interests of Mammon and of God are opposed to one another, and there must be a firm resolution, and a decided choice, that God is to be served. "The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

25. *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*

This is the answer to the objection which human nature is likely to cast in the way of the preceding exhortations. Men will be disposed to ask, If I neglect worldly advantages, because the pursuit of them might endanger my soul, what will become of the interests of my family? Our Lord replies, *Take no thought*, no anxious thought concerning this. *Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?* What would meat or raiment profit a man, who lost his life to obtain them? Even so much would this world's good profit him, who in seeking it neglected his soul.²

² Doddridge has a different interpretation. "Is not life a more valuable gift than food, and the body than raiment? And if it be, why should you not trust the Almighty Being who formed your bodies, to maintain the work of his own hands!"

26. *Behold the fowls of the air : for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ?*

27. *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature ?*

28. *And why take ye thought for raiment ? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin :*

29. *And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

30. *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith ?*

Here the timid, distrustful heart is strengthened by a further encouragement. Our apprehensions, our anxieties are a reproach upon God's providence. The man who rests upon his own exertions may be disappointed at last ; *for which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature ?* But whoever has chosen the world to come for his inheritance, has secured God for his protection : and will not He who has provided that *the fowls of the air* should not be without their natural food, or *the lilies of the field* perish for lack of moisture ; will not he far more surely make his adopted children, those who trust in him, his care, and see that they neither want their "bread to eat, nor raiment to put on ?" While many "rise up early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness," God "giveth his beloved sleep ;" gives them a calm tranquillity respecting worldly things, an experimental conviction that He will order matters better for them, than they could order for themselves.

31. *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat ? or, What shall we drink ? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed ?*

32. *(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek :) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*

33. *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

34. *Take therefore no thought for the morrow : for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

To the command which came before, is here added, in conclusion, an affectionate exhortation to direct all our anxieties towards the heavenly kingdom, and to “cast upon God all our care” respecting this world, “knowing that he careth for us.” Leave it to *the Gentiles*, who are not made children of God through adoption in Christ; leave it for them to immerse themselves in worldly cares : *you have a heavenly Father, who knoweth that ye have need of all these things.* Do you doubt his knowing it? and do you believe that, knowing your need, he will suffer you to perish in your need? Why should the child perplex itself about its food or its clothing? why be uneasy, beforehand, concerning that which is its parent’s business, and which its parent will certainly provide? Even so God is the Christian’s parent, and to distrust his care, is to deny his faithfulness. “I have been young,” are the words of David, “and now am old :” “yet never saw I the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.” If we *seek first the kingdom of God*, and are aiming above all things to approve ourselves *righteous* in his sight,

he will secure to us righteousness and its reward : this is the chief concern :—but more also *shall be added unto you*. As he promised Solomon, “Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life ; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself : wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee : And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour.” (2 Chron. i. 7—12 ; 1 Kings iii. 13.)

“Oh, what a blessed change would it make in our hearts and lives, did we but firmly believe this truth, that the best way to be comfortably provided for in this world, is to be most intent upon another world ! We then begin at the right end of our work, when we begin with God. Let us mind present duty, and then leave events to him. Do the work of to-day in its day, and then let to-morrow bring its work along with it. If this is our resolution, the Lord will provide as much of the comforts of this life as he sees good for us, and more of them we need not wish for. Have we trusted him for ‘the portion of our inheritance at the end,’ and shall we not trust him for ‘the portion of our cup,’ in the way to it ? O that we were more thoughtful about ‘the things that are not seen, and are eternal,’ and then the less thoughtful we should be, and the less thoughtful we should need to be, about ‘the things that are seen, that are temporal.’”³

³ Henry in loco.

LECTURE XVI.

AGAINST UNCHARITABLE JUDGMENTS.
PROMISE OF DIVINE GRACE.

MATT. vii. 1—12.

(Luke. vi. 37—42.)

1. *Judge not, that ye be not judged.*
2. *For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged : and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*
3. *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye ?*
4. *Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye ; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye ?*
5. *Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye ; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*¹

A censorious habit of harsh judgment is here forbidden. Censoriousness puts the worst construction upon doubtful actions. "Charity hopeth all things." Censoriousness often ascribes even good actions to wrong or interested motives. "Charity, on the contrary, believeth all things." Charity will rather be deceived, through an unwillingness to suspect, than injure a fellow-creature even in thought.

¹ This was a proverb among the Jews : Those who say to others, Take out the *small piece of wood* from beneath *thy tooth* : are answered, "Take out of *thine eyes the beam*."

Observe, too, how one spirit pervades the whole of our Lord's discourses. We are instructed to look *within*. The same feeling which obliges us to forgive, also obliges us to charitable judgment ;—a sense of our own deficiencies. Who has not *a beam to cast out of his own eye*? “He shall have judgment without mercy, who has shewed no mercy.”

At the same time, it is often our duty to *judge*. We must discriminate between good and evil. We are told to “prove all things, to hold fast that which is good :” to “believe not every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they are of God.” This is quite consistent with the truest charity.

6. *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*

Though it is a christian duty to teach and to reprove, prudence must be consulted in both. There are those, with whom to talk of holy things is to profane them : and who will perhaps turn against religion itself the very arguments which are furnished by religion. Like Pharaoh, when he answered the demand of Moses, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?” (Exod. v. 2.) On this account, Solomon has said, “He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame.” (Prov. ix. 7.) This is a matter, however, in which zeal must be united with discretion, as well as discretion with zeal. Many “a man hath had joy by the answer of his mouth : and a word spoken in due season, how good is it !” (Prov. xv. 23.)

(Luke xi. 9—13.)

7. *Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you :*

8. *For every one that asketh, receiveth ; and he that seeketh, findeth ; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.*

9. *Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone ?*

10. *Or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent ?*

11. *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him ?*

12. *Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them ; for this is the law and the prophets.*

What earnest attention would these words command, if they related to this present world ! “ *Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find.*” Nothing more clearly betrays the weakness of our faith, than the indifference with which we receive this promise, because it concerns spiritual blessings. We see, however, the encouragement which the words were intended to convey, from the connexion in which they are found. The disciples had been listening to many difficult injunctions. And they might naturally ask, or at least think within themselves, “ Who is sufficient for these things ?” Our Lord meets this inquiry by the assurance, repeated by his apostles afterwards, “ If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally.” (James i. 5.) And as men often

² That spiritual blessings are chiefly intended in this passage, appears from the parallel verse in St. Luke : “ How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him !”

doubt the performance of promises, fearing lest they are too good to be true, he even vouchsafes to argue with them ; and asks, Do not you, notwithstanding all the *evil* there is about you, give such *good gifts* as are in your power to *your children* ? How much more shall your *heavenly Father*, who is altogether holy and righteous, *give good things* to those who are made “children by adoption and grace,” when they sincerely and earnestly desire them ?

The repetition here, *ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you*—is not without meaning. It reminds us of the sincerity, the perseverance, the faith, which must accompany prayer, in order that it may prove successful. A man does not *ask*, ask with earnestness, unless he is sensible of a want. We must feel our need of pardon and of grace, that we may ask them to any purpose. A man who *seeks*, anxiously seeks, a benefit, will persevere : and we are to “pray always and not to faint :” we are to “ask in faith,” believing ; as a man who *knocks* at a gate, wishes to enter it, or expects that good is to be obtained there.

A gracious encouragement to prayer is given in these words. But how lightly it is valued ! How commonly is prayer considered as a burdensome duty, rather than a delightful privilege !

The way to judge of this, is to reflect how it would be with those whose day of trial is over, and who are now “shut up in everlasting darkness unto the great day.” If they who, while on earth, had refused to “hear Moses and the prophets,”

could rise once more from the dead, and were invited to ask for pardon, that they might receive it, to seek for grace that they might find it, to knock at the gate of heaven in time, and it should be opened unto them through eternity; how gladly would they welcome the invitation, and grasp at the offered blessing!

Let us, then, “seek the Lord whilst he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.” Bitter indeed will be the reflection in the eternal world, that the pardon purchased by Christ, and all the unspeakable blessings attending it, might have been ours, had we thought them worth diligently seeking, in humble, fervent prayer.

Some, perhaps, may feel dispirited, and think that the promise of our Lord in this passage is hardly accomplished. They may lament that the supplies of grace, which they had looked for, are less speedily and less abundantly ministered than they hoped and expected. But let not this discourage them. The Spirit is not really ever absent, where its presence is anxiously desired. They may have grown in grace, yet their growth may have been imperceptible to themselves. One thing is sure, that whosoever perseveres in prayer, has not prayed in vain. God has given to them a “spirit of prayer and supplication,” and this is a pledge and earnest of all other blessings.

LECTURE XVI.

THE WAY OF LIFE NARROW.—FALSE PROPHETS.

MATT. vii. 13—20.

13. *Enter ye in at the strait gate ; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat :*

14. *Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

What is here declared, deserves our most serious attention, and must never be dismissed from our minds. It comes from Him who cannot deceive or be deceived ; and he says, *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

Many indeed *there be*, as far as can be judged from appearances, who think otherwise ; and pass through life as if heaven was the only thing which they could not fail to find ; everlasting happiness, the only thing which might be attained without seeking and without pains.

The truth, however, of which this passage warns us, agrees but too well with all that we see and observe. *Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction.* Many paths unite, and lead to the same end.

Those must be in the way of destruction, who “live without God in the world ;” those who,—

whether blinded by ignorance, or perverted by false philosophy; whether occupied in business, or immersed in pleasure,—still “have not God in all their thoughts,” are regardless of his will, and do nothing to his glory.

Those must be in the way of destruction who live in the allowed practice of sin. “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”

Those must be in the way of destruction, who “having a form of godliness, deny the power thereof;” who “professing to serve God, in works deny him.” Such must at last expect the question, “How camest thou in hither, not having the wedding garment?”

If then, on the most cursory view of the way in which mankind are living, we must allow that the road to destruction is broad, so we must equally perceive that *the way that leadeth unto life is narrow.*

For, first, it is one single way. The Author of eternal life has told us, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” Therefore the Jews missed it, “because they sought it not by faith.” How many, as they did, “stumble at that stumbling stone! As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”¹

But even when that way is seen to be the true way, and is entered upon as such, many things render it difficult to keep. Persecution made it

¹ Rom. ix. 32, 33.

strait to the primitive Christians ; trials of a like kind are not unknown now. The question is too natural, whether asked by mistaken friends, or asked by our own corrupt hearts, Why do ye more than others ? Therefore many who “ receive the word with gladness,” endure but for a time ; afterwards, “ when affliction or persecution ariseth for the world’s sake, immediately they are offended.”

With another class, “ the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

Hence the lamentable conclusion, *strait is the gate which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*. This, however, ought not to discourage, but to warn and animate. It may justly warn us to know, *that broad is the way that leadeth to destruction* : but it may also justly animate us to be assured, that there is a gate which opens the kingdom of heaven to all believers. This gate, *strait* as it is, “ whosoever will” may enter : this way, *narrow* as it is, “ whosoever will”² may keep. The invitation is clear, the promise sure ; experience verifies the words of the Redeemer : “ I am the door ; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.”

Only let us exercise our reason ; and if he whom we profess to trust affirms that *the way of life is narrow*, let us not act as if it never could be missed ; let us constantly examine whether we have discovered it, whether we remain in it ; and keep watch diligently, that we may not be diverted from it.

² Rev. xxii. 17. See also Is. lv. 1.

15. *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

16. *Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*

17. *Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*

18. *A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

19. *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

20. *Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

The Jews had suffered much from *false prophets*: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so."³ Such had been too often the calamity of the Jewish nation.

The christian world is warned against a like evil: "Many false prophets shall rise, and deceive many." "There shall be false teachers among you." "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

The prediction has been too truly fulfilled; and the warning too little observed. Wide indeed has been, and too widely still extends, the dominion of false prophets. *They come in sheep's clothing.* They profess that they seek the welfare of the flock, and that the welfare of the flock depends solely on themselves. *But inwardly they are ravening wolves*; "not sparing the flock;" "teachers of what they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake;" "through covetousness by feigned words, making merchandize of others." They "say, Peace, peace; when there is no peace:"⁴ or they make "the

³ Jeremiah v. 31.

⁴ Jeremiah vi. 14.

heart of the righteous sad, which God has not made sad.”⁵ In various ways they “subvert the hearers,” whom they are bound to establish in the faith of Christ.

There is a rule, however, by which these and any other false teachers may be discerned. *Ye shall know them by their fruits.* The great purpose of our Lord’s coming, was to “redeem men from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Every teacher that does not exhibit that character in himself, and study to produce it in others, is a false teacher. Every doctrine which does not tend to promote individual righteousness and holiness, is false doctrine. *Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them.* Grapes may as reasonably be expected from thorns, as a good life from unsound doctrine; figs may as well be sought from thistles, as the work of an effective ministry from a corrupt teacher. “He that winneth souls,” must himself be first won by “the wisdom which is from above.”

On reviewing the whole of this passage, what awful thoughts it suggests to us! A broad road of destruction! a narrow gate of life! false teachers to keep us in the one, and divert us from the other! We could scarcely credit this, if it were not declared by Him who cannot err.

There is, however, on the other side a consolation: “God willeth all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.” He will provide that all “shall find him, who shall search for him

⁵ Ezek. xiii. 22.

with their whole heart.”⁶ He will teach them to distinguish truth from falsehood, and keep them from material error. They shall “hear a word, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it.”⁷ They shall be known by their fruits as having been “taught of God.” And hereafter they shall be rewarded as the good trees of the vineyard, which have brought forth their fruit in its season.

LECTURE XVIII.

OBEDIENCE THE EVIDENCE OF FAITH.

MATT. vii. 21—29.

21. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

22. *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and in thy name have cast out devils ? and in thy name done many wonderful works ?*

23. *And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you : depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

The sayings of our Lord in the preceding discourse, have been intended to display the nature of true righteousness, both towards God and man, and to condemn the defective views which had

⁶ Jerem. xxix. 13.

⁷ Isaiah xxx. 21.

hitherto prevailed. He concludes by affirming, that no standard short of that which he had set up, could be allowed to his disciples, or prove any man to be one of them. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven: that will*, which he had been enforcing and explaining. And he closes all by a comparison.

(Luke vi. 46—49.)

24. *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:*

25. *And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*

26. *And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:*

27. *And the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.*

28. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:*

29. *For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

The similitude in this passage is every way exact. Men build a house, looking to future time. And they look to future time, when they “take the yoke of Christ” upon them. They are in life, nay, in health, and in strength; but they look to the time of weakness, and of age; and of death, and of judgment; and against that season they lay a foundation and provide a refuge.

Neither is it enough, to lay a slight and inadequate foundation, and build what they may design to be a refuge. The man is called *wise*, who builds on a sure foundation, and *lays it on a rock*. Will a builder say, that because it is calm weather, or low water when he builds, he will neglect his foundation, and place his house on the sandy shore ? For a while indeed it might stand ; just as while a man is well, or prosperous, or busy, he may feel no alarm, be sensible of no danger, and find no want of a just title to religious confidence. But the house which stood secure while all was calm, rocks and totters when the storms arise. All within is hurry, confusion, and alarm. So it is with the man *who heareth these sayings, and doeth them not* : who has named the name of Christ, and said unto him, *Lord, Lord*, but has given no signs of faith in his life, nor been zealous to *do the will of his Father which is in heaven*. Such nominal religion is a sandy foundation, which will neither stand in the hour of death, nor in the day of judgment. It will not stand in the hour of death : for a man will feel reminded then of what he had before forgotten, how “ without holiness no man can see the Lord ;” and how the Saviour condemned those who “ called him Master and Lord,” and “ did not the things which he said.” Neither will it stand in the day of judgment : for Christ has himself declared, that he will reply to such as trusted in their Church to save them, and in their christian name to save them, and showed no other signs of being in his faith ;—*I never knew you, ye that work iniquity*.

Here then is a sufficient reason why we should never be satisfied, as though “we had already attained, either were already perfect;” but should be constantly pressing onward in the course of obedience, and sanctification, and fervent zeal. Nothing else will avail in the season of trial. An inexperienced person might stand by an architect, who was clearing away the loose or sandy earth where a house was to be built, and was perhaps laying down arches or driving in piles, at a great expense of time and trouble; he might see this, and ask, why so much labour should be employed on what was to be buried under ground, and to make no part of the building. The answer is,—were we to build without a foundation, or not to make that foundation deep and strong, the house might endure for a while; but when the wintry storms arise, and the swelling stream beats vehemently against it, that is, at the very season when you most need a safe and comfortable shelter, you would be forced to leave it, and go elsewhere for security.

So it is with regard to the state of the heart before God. While we are employed in the active concerns of life, and engaged in the daily business which occupies our minds, a slight stay is enough for a man; he sees himself better than others, he sees others worse than himself; he performs some religious duties, he does not very often fall into very gross sins; so he lulls his conscience, and contents himself with a general hope that there is no need of more thought or more fear; he trusts that he is within the christian covenant, and that God will receive him into his kingdom.

But the storm comes at some time or other ; the tempest of affliction, or of sickness, or of approaching death. This is the trial of religion, for it is against this trial that religion is to prepare you. And then the man who has made no more than a nominal profession of faith in Christ, and has never laboured to adorn his Saviour's doctrine by a pure and holy conversation, by resisting the sin of his heart, by "abounding in the work of the Lord ;" he feels that this is no time for deceiving his own soul, as he may have done hitherto, by vain words. He feels that a merely outward profession was not the faith intended by the command, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ;" that it was not merely outward profession which Paul was making, when he "brought under his body, and kept it in subjection ;" that outward profession is not the faith required by St. James, who insists that we "show our faith by our works ;" that it is not outward profession which will be recompensed by the blessed words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Those who had *prophesied in the name of Christ, and cast out devils, and done many wonderful works*, had made more outward profession than he can have to show. Yet they are rejected ; *depart from me, ye that work iniquity*.

Now, therefore, is the time for laying a foundation which will stand good at the last. We must not be satisfied, unless when we look into ourselves and examine our lives, we have "the testimony of our conscience," that it has been our purpose, our prayer, our labour, to be "neither bar-

ren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ :” but to add to our faith virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and brotherly kindness, and charity.¹

Observe, however, that there is nothing in this to contradict the general language of the gospel ; nothing to imply that a man’s own righteousness is to be the ground of his confidence. This would indeed be to *build our house upon the sand*. “ By grace we are saved ; not of works, lest any man should boast.” But the truth here declared, is another truth, no less to be insisted on, that the practice of a Christian must be as peculiar as his faith ; that the faith in which he professes to live, must shine in his actions, must speak in his words, must breathe in his spirit and temper. Then, though the floods may come, and the winds blow, and the stream beat against your house, it shall not be shaken ; *for it is founded upon a rock*. For “ though your earthly habitation is dissolved,” you have a habitation secured for you in the heavens, whose builder and maker is God ; where no storms shall rage, no tempests ever threaten ; but all shall be a perpetual calm and sunshine, in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

¹ See 2 Pet. i. 5—8.

LECTURE XIX.

THE LEPER CLEANSED.—THE CENTURION'S FAITH APPROVED.

MATT. viii. 1—13.

(Mark i. 40—45. Luke v. 12—16.)

1. *When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.*

2. *And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

3. *And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*

4. *And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

It was ordained in the law (see Levit. xiv.) that every leper who was cleansed from his disease should be “brought unto the priest;” and that a particular offering and atonement should be made by the priests on his behalf, when convinced of the reality of the cure.

This man had been healed of his leprosy by the power of Christ; it was acknowledged that no human skill could cure this disease. This man, therefore, was *a testimony* unto the priests that “God had visited his people.” No man could “do these miracles, except God were with him.” (John iii. 2.)

Every one who “lives in the faith of the Son of God,” is *a testimony* to all who know him of the power of Christ. Sinfulness, indeed, is not eradicated from the heart, as we may suppose that the disease of this leper was eradicated. Still he is a different man from what he was before he embraced the faith of Christ, or from what he would have been, if he had not embraced it; his conduct, his sentiments, the temper of his mind, his whole character, supplies *a testimony* to the fact, that the gospel can teach, and persuade, and enable a man to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

Remember, if you profess to believe in Christ, God expects that you should afford a testimony of it: “that men should see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

(Luke vii. 1—10.)

5. *And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,*

6. *And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.*

St. Luke, in relating this miracle, (vii. 2—10,) tells us more of the character of this centurion. He was a Roman officer; and being stationed in Judea, had profited, we may believe, by the knowledge of God which prevailed in that land. Hardly expecting that he himself, as a foreigner, should obtain a favour from our Lord, “when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, that he was worthy for whom he should do

this: for he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue." He had learnt to know the God of Israel; and he had shown this, by employing his authority and means to provide a temple for his worship. Coming to Judea from a heathen land, and finding a religious creed and worship different from his own, he did not ridicule it, as the heathens were commonly accustomed to ridicule the Jews: he did not refuse to examine it, as too many pass by with neglect what differs from the ideas they have received: but he inquired, and discovered, as well he might, that there was no nation like that of the Jews, "which had God so nigh unto them."¹ Probably he acknowledged and worshipped the true God who in the beginning had made the heavens and the earth: certainly, however, he honoured him, and built his people a synagogue. And this his simplicity and sincerity, in following the light which he had, was now to meet with its reward.

7. *And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.*

8. *The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*

9. *For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*

This reply affords us, first, an example of real humility. The Jews had said of him, *He is worthy* that this should be done for him; but he declared of himself, *I am not worthy*. I have no claim to the distinction of receiving *under my roof* the Son

¹ Deut. iv. 7.

of God. So it is with every sincere Christian. Others admire and praise them; but they are so intimately aware of their own infirmities, that they cannot take such praise unto themselves; and rejoice in the reflection, that they have something better to depend upon than their own unworthiness. And this state of mind is pleasing to God: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Consider next the faith of this centurion. Being a man in authority himself, as well as under authority, he knew what was the effect of authority: he knew that he obeyed the command of his king, and that he had only to *say to his servants, Do this, and they did it.* And he believed that Jesus had the same authority, the same power; that he had but to speak the word, and his will should be done; that not only "the winds and the sea," but disease and death, would obey him.

This was what, at that time, men were bound to believe concerning Jesus: they were to own what Nicodemus owned, that "no man could do the miracles that he did, unless God were with him." This the Jews in general refused to believe; but the centurion had no obstinate prejudices, encouraged no disposition of mind which opposed his conviction; and the miracles he had seen, or the doctrines he had heard, had produced their proper effect, and wrought in him FAITH. And our Lord, who knows what is the state of mind in which faith is wrought, and what is the state of mind which resists the influence of the Holy Spirit, approved his faith, and honoured it with a special mark of favour.

10. *When Jesus heard it, he marvelled,² and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*

11. *And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.*

12. *But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Here the great truth is laid open, which the Jews were so unwilling to receive, and which only a special vision led even Peter to acknowledge, that "in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts x. 35.)

The reason why it should be so, that *the children of the kingdom should be cast out*,* is plain from the history which tells us that it was so. The book of Acts is full of examples. One will suffice ; (Acts xiii. 45, 46 ;) "When the Jews saw the multitudes"—saw how many were *come from the east and west*, in order to listen to the words of the God of "*Abraham and Isaac and Jacob*"—"they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you : but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves

² *He marvelled.* The evangelist speaks of the impression which our Lord's manner had upon those who stood by : he had the appearance of surprise. But he "knew what was in man," and required no outward proof of it.

unworthy of everlasting life, lo ! we turn to the Gentiles." Thus many of the Gentiles became partakers of the patriarchs' faith, and shall hereafter be partakers of their resurrection ; whilst *the children of the kingdom* closed the door of everlasting life against themselves.

How grievous is it, whether through prejudice, as here, or, as too often, through worldly lusts and cares, when men "put from them the word of God," "which is able to make them wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus !"

13. *And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way ; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.*

What is here said to the centurion, is applicable to all, at all times. The language of the Gospel is, *As thou hast believed*, "according to thy faith," *so be it done unto thee*. According to our faith in the divine Word, and in Him whom that word makes known to us, so will it be with us all.

May He who sees every heart and knows what is the faith of every individual, may he give us that true faith on which the promise of everlasting life depends !

LECTURE XX.

PETER'S WIFE'S MOTHER HEALED.—
ANSWERS TO THE SCRIBE AND THE DISCIPLE.—
TEMPEST CALMED.

MATT. viii. 14—27.

(MARK i. 29.—33.)

14. *And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.*

15. *And he touched her hand, and the fever left her : and she arose, and ministered unto them.*

16. *When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils ; and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick :*

17. *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.¹*

He himself took our infirmities. Such was the “ grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.”²

He bare our sicknesses. He bare our diseased nature, that he might heal it of that mortal disease, its sinfulness. And now, by restoring the bodies of men, he gave an earnest of the recovery of their souls.

The apostle Peter, when he alludes to the same

¹ Isaiah liii. 4. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.

² 2 Cor. viii. 9.

passage of Isaiah, deduces from it the inference which ought never to be absent from our minds, "He bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness."³

(Luke ix. 57—62.)

18. *Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.*

19. *And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.*

20. *And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests : but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*

21. *And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*

22. *But Jesus said unto him, Follow me, and let the dead⁴ bury their dead.*

Two replies are here given of a very different tenor; and without doubt, were each adapted to the peculiar case which called them forth. In one case, the scribe is admonished to "sit down first and count the cost," before he undertook to *follow Jesus whithersoever he went*. He, we may conclude, was of an ardent and sanguine temperament; and there was danger, lest, though he "received the word with joy," he should "have no root in himself," and "when tribulation or persecution

³ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

⁴ The spiritually dead. By this awful term those are described who are "dead in trespasses and sins." A sentence in St. John represents at once both their state and the means of their recovery. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when *the dead* shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and *they that hear shall live*."—John v. 25.

arose because of the word, by-and-bye, he should be offended." Let him therefore consider first, whether he was prepared to "take up his cross, and deny himself," and so come after Jesus; whether he would forego all present reward, all hope of ease and comfort for the sake of future glory.

The disciple, on the contrary, needed excitement rather than caution. He could not be trusted among those whom he would have found at home. Therefore our Lord says to him, *Let the dead bury their dead*: leave those who are *naturally* dead, and whose state cannot now be changed, to the care of those who are *spiritually* dead, and will not be roused to seek a heavenly kingdom. *Thou* hast a peculiar and important call: "Go thou and preach the kingdom of God."⁵

The lesson, then, which is to be derived from these words, is—that the soul, whether our own or of others, is a treasure so precious, that the securing its welfare is in all circumstances the "one thing needful." No man can imagine that our Lord was indifferent to filial duties. We know that from the cross itself, he provided for the comfort of his own parent's declining years; saying to "the disciple whom he loved, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." But in the case of this person, his wisdom foresaw, that if he returned to his own family, he might be entangled in a dangerous snare. Therefore it was one of those instances where even father and mother were to be left for the sake of the kingdom of heaven: where he

⁵ This is added in Luke ix. 60.

who had found the “one pearl of great price,” was to sell all that he had, and buy that pearl.

(Mark iv. 37—41. Luke viii. 22—25.)

23. *And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.*

24. *And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves : but he was asleep.*

25. *And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us ; we perish.*

26. *And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith ? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea ; and there was a great calm.*

27. *But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him ?*

In the circumstances of this short voyage, the disciples might find a sample of their future life. They might perceive that they would be exposed to trials. Their Master uniformly assured them so. His prayer was, not that they might be taken out of the world, but that they might be kept from the evil. He told them, that “in the world” they should “have tribulation.”⁶ But he added, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” And here they learn, by experience, to whom they may apply, and where they may find assistance in their danger. *Why were they so fearful ?* However it might seem, he was really wakeful to all their wants, and watching over all their trials. And with him they were safe.

Remember, too, that it is not only in a season of unusual difficulty that we need this preservation.

⁶ John xvii. 15.

We must acknowledge in the calm of prosperity, no less than in the severest storms of life, that CHRIST must *save us, or we perish*. He must save us from being so engrossed with “the cares or pleasures of this world,” as to become unfruitful. He must save us from setting our affections on earthly things, when we have many earthly things to allure our affections.

Have you been aware of this? Are you daily sensible of it? Daily coming to him in prayer, that he may deliver you in all time of your wealth, as well as in all time of your tribulation? Satan will raise up storms or calms, within us or around us;—this is our danger: but Christ will carry us safely through them;—this is the security of all who have sincerely made that prayer their own, *Lord, save us: we perish*.

LECTURE XXI.

UNCLEAN SPIRITS CAST INTO THE HERD OF SWINE.

MATT. viii. 28—34.

28. *And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes,¹ there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.*

¹ This was the region of Gadara, chiefly inhabited by Jews, but surrounded by Gentiles.

29. *And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?*

This history, more fully than any other, acquaints us with the power of those evil spirits which Christ Jesus came to subdue. It is a subject upon which we can proceed no further than Scripture leads us by the hand. Scripture, however, tells us, as of the great enemy of mankind, “the power of darkness,” “the prince of this world;” so likewise of other evil spirits who are permitted to exercise power over men. Jesus had begun his ministry by overcoming Satan; he proceeds to show that the Son of God was come, and for what purpose he was come, by subduing those inferior spirits, who at this period seem especially to have exerted their malevolent power. They knew, it appears, who was appointed to restrain them and break their dominion. They cried out, saying, *What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?* Thou art light, and we are darkness: what have we to do with thee? Happily for the world, for this purpose he came; “for this was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” And an awful subject of thought is opened to us in the words that follow, *Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?* This shows a fearful expectation of wrath to come; of the judgment awaiting them, of which St. Peter speaks, (2 Ep. ii. 4,) “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.”

For them, then, “there remaineth no more

sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." To us they seem to say, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."

30. *And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine, feeding.*

31. *So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.*

32. *And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine ; and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.*

The devils besought him, Suffer us to go into the herd of swine. Without permission they could do nothing. This agrees with what we read in Job's history, (ch. i. 12,) "The Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power ; only upon himself put not forth thy hand." And again, (ch. ii. 6,) "The Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand : but save his life."

The Jews were forbidden to eat the flesh of swine. (Deut. xiv. 8.) "The swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you : ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcase." Therefore those who kept them were not obedient to the law, and this destruction of their herd may have been intended as a punishment. But the great purpose of the whole was, no doubt, to show the dominion of Jesus over the spiritual world. It has been supposed, that the power of devils was allowed to be

more evidently exerted at the period of our Lord's ministry than at any other time before or since, in order that his own superior power, his universal sovereignty, might appear. In the same way as temporal evils and bodily disorders are permitted for some purpose which God brings about by means of them, which we know not now, but may know hereafter. When the disciples inquired of our Lord, whether it was the sin of the parents, or of the man himself, which had been punished by his being "born blind," the answer was, "Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents:" no particular sin on the part of either has been the cause, though all evils are derived to us from Adam's sin; "but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." So by the power at this time exercised, evidently exercised, by unclean spirits, the greater power of him who "with authority commanded them, and they obeyed him," was displayed in the sight of all who witnessed this miracle.

Another truth appears which well deserves attention;—namely, the miserable end to which those bring themselves who are given up to the dominion of evil spirits. We are well assured that none are so given up, till they have rejected all means of grace. But do we not sometimes see sinners run headlong upon their own destruction, in a manner of which this history exhibits a striking example? Pharaoh, for instance; proceeding, in defiance of repeated warnings and judgments, first to sin, and then to profess repentance, and then to sin again; till at last he openly arrayed himself against God,

² See John ix 1—3.

pursued his people into the midst of the sea, and perished in the waters. This is an extraordinary case : but much of the same nature may be traced in the life and death of many heinous sinners. The “unclean spirit goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there ; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”³

“Be wise therefore.” “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the right way.” Make Him your friend, who is able to restrain and bind the enemy of your souls. If instead of his mercy being engaged for you, “his wrath be kindled against you, yea but a little,” “who shall abide his coming?” “Blessed are they that put their trust in him.”

The miracle, it appears, at the time, had no such salutary effect upon the Gadarenes.

33. *And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.*

34. *And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus : and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.*

They little knew that he whom they besought to *depart out of their coasts*, “came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them ;” that “judgment is his strange work ;” and that even his miracles, the purpose of which was to manifest his power, were used, in almost every instance, to manifest his benevolence too. Rather should they have *besought him*

to remain amongst them, and deliver them from the evils by which they were harassed and perplexed. But they knew not what they did. Even now, when the merciful purpose of Jesus Christ is fully revealed, many act as these people acted. Instead of courting the Redeemer, they put him from them, and drive his Spirit from their hearts. They yield to first impressions against serious religion, and rather dread and resist, than encourage it in themselves and others. Will not the hour come, when the words of wisdom shall be made good? (Prov. i. 24.) “Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.”

LECTURE XXII.

THE PARALYTIC HEALED.—SINNERS CALLED TO REPENTANCE.

MATT. ix. 1—13.

(Mark ii. 1—13; Luke v. 17—26.)

1. *And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.* ¹

¹ Capernaum, not Nazareth, was at this time our Lord's own city.

2. *And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.*

3. *And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.*

4. *And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?*

5. *For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?*

6. *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.*

7. *And he arose, and departed to his house.*

8. *But when the multitude saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.*

It is plain that he who could say, *Arise, and walk*, if it should prove so, and the paralytic *did arise and walk*, must have God with him: the sight of such miracles, therefore, ought to have put favourable thoughts, not *evil, in their hearts*; ought to have convinced them that he was no blasphemer, and might be listened to when he said, *Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee*. Otherwise, if the remark had not proceeded from malice instead of piety, it was natural to think *this man blasphemeth*; it was a just idea, “who can forgive sins, save God only?” “Sin is the transgression of the law,” the divine law: and he alone can forgive the offence, who is offended by the sin. We, however, know, that “God has committed all judgment unto the Son;” that *the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins*. We know how dearly he purchased that power: even at the price of his own blood. And happy indeed

we are who do know it; who neither depend upon the vain pretensions of men, claiming to be the vicegerents of God, and to hold his mercy in their hands; nor rest on a vague hope, that repentance may efface the memory of the past; nor comfort ourselves with a groundless belief, that God will make no “difference between him that serveth him, and him that serveth him not.” We depend upon an actual price, paid to discharge a debt incurred: we appeal to satisfaction really made, to reconcile the offended to the offender. He who made this satisfaction *hath power on earth to forgive sins*; and, trusting to this, we have real comfort when he says, *Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.*

To whom, then, does he thus speak? To every sincere penitent, who comes to God through him. “God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.” (1 John v. 11, 12.) May the Holy Spirit implant this faith in us more and more, that through it we may have “all joy and peace in believing!”

(Mark ii. 13—17; Luke v. 27—32.)

9. *And as Jesus passed from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom; and he saith unto him, Follow me; and he arose, and followed him.*

10. *And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came, and sat down with him and his disciples.*

11. *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?*

12. *But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*

13. *But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice ; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

Our Lord justifies his conduct, first, as being natural. He was to the soul, what the physician is to the body. Is it not to be expected that a physician should attend to those most, who most need his assistance ? or to those who, because they are most sensible of their danger, most earnestly seek his aid ?

And further, he tells the Pharisees that they might have found in the law and the prophets enough to show them, that mercy is more pleasing to God than judgment ; that the charitable disposition which they had not, is more acceptable to the Lord, than all the sacrifices and formal services which they so hypocritically paid. For there it is written, "To do justice and judgment, is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice." (Prov. xxi. 3.) And again, "I desired mercy and not sacrifice ; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hos. vi. 6.)

But beyond all this, it was the very purpose of his coming, to receive publicans and sinners. *I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

These are remarkable words, and so considered ; for Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, all record them. It is important, therefore, to ascertain their real meaning ; especially as they might be so interpreted as to lead to error.

“I am not come to call *the righteous* to repentance.” Then there are some so righteous as to need no repentance. This would be an error; for “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.”

Again, “I am not come to call *the righteous* to repentance.” The Pharisees “esteem themselves righteous, and despise others:” I do not therefore call them to repentance. This also would be an error; for our Lord said to the Scribes and Pharisees, as clearly as he said to all others, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

Again, “I am not come to call *the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*” Therefore God regards the sinner above the righteous. This too would be an error: for “the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour;” and “in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.”

What the words really tell us, is, first, the purpose of our Lord’s coming; of God manifesting himself in the flesh. If mankind had remained righteous, they would not have needed a Redeemer. He came, not to a righteous, but to a sinful world.

This sentence, however, does also express the distinguishing character of the gospel, as encouraging sinners to repent; as offering to those who might seem farthest removed from it, a message of mercy and pardon. The Pharisees, as is everywhere evident, looked down upon the wicked with contempt, or passed by them in despair. Christ, on the contrary, affirmed that “all manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men,” who should repent

and believe in him. This was the peculiar feature of the gospel: this made it "glad tidings to all people." It "is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." So St. Paul affirms, (1 Tim. i. 15, 16,) and then points out his own case as an example. "Of whom (of sinners) I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting." That not only the words might be recorded, "*I came to call sinners to repentance*;" but that a pattern might be held forth among the apostles themselves, of whom one had been actually called from a state of blasphemy and malice, and cruelty, and brought, by the mercy of God, "through faith unto salvation."

The whole passage, therefore, is full of comfort and encouragement to the broken and contrite heart. The sentence which our Lord has selected from the scriptures, to show the character of the Almighty, is not a sentence of condemnation, but of "good-will towards men." *I will have mercy and not sacrifice.*" And the purpose of his own incarnation is declared to be, the bringing of the exhortation of the prophet to effect, "Return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you; and unto our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

LECTURE XXIII.

THE DISCIPLES DEFENDED FOR NOT FASTING.
A RULER'S DAUGHTER RESTORED TO LIFE.

MATT. ix. 14—26.

(Mark ii. 18—22 ; Luke v. 33—39.)

14. *Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not ?*

It appeared strange to men who had been accustomed to attach great value to austerities and outward observances in religion, that nothing of this kind should be practised by our Lord's disciples. The Pharisee's boast was, "I fast twice in the week." And "John came neither eating nor drinking." He had "his raiment of camel's hair, and his meat of locusts and wild honey." *Why do thy disciples fast not ?*

For this there were three reasons. The first related to himself.

15. *And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them ? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.*

Fasting was attended with mourning, and was a sign of mourning. When David "besought God for his child, he fasted and lay all night upon the earth."¹ When anger from the Lord, "great and very terrible," was denounced against the inhabitants

¹ 2 Sam. xii. 16.

of Jerusalem, the exhortation of the prophet was, "Therefore now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning."²

But at the present season it would be unsuitable for the disciples of Christ to fast or mourn. The time would come when it would be very needful. There was no fear lest they should not be called to sufficient sorrow and self-denial, *when the bridegroom shall be taken from them: and then shall they fast* in those days.

How striking is the prophecy contained in these words! My disciples have a comfort and encouragement now, which they shall not long enjoy. The time is coming, when in the world they shall have only "tribulation." and when such shall be their trials and their difficulties, that they will be "in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."

This sentence, which had an especial application to the apostles, bears a general meaning which may be carried much farther. Scripture often represents the Son of God as a bridegroom to his spouse, the church. And there are seasons with the church, when his favour seems more abundantly bestowed: when the Lord gives the word, and great is the company of those who declare the glad tidings of salvation: and when his Spirit accompanies the truth as it is spoken, conveys it to many hearts, turns many to righteousness.

So likewise there are times with the individual followers of Christ, when his presence blesses them

² Joel ii. 12.

continually : and they experience the fulfilment of his promise, “Peace I leave with you :” “they are filled with all joy and peace in believing.” They cannot mourn ; the bridegroom is with them.

But other days come, to the church, when he suffers the enemy to disturb its prosperity ; or to individuals, when the remaining corruptions of the heart cloud the evidences of faith. Fear prevails over hope ; *the Bridegroom is taken away* ; the light of that countenance in which they were used to rejoice is withdrawn :—*then shall they fast in those days* ; and long for the season when there shall be no more sorrow, or fear, or temptation.

This, however, we must bear in mind. The *Bridegroom was taken away*, and left his disciples sorrowing. But it was only his visible presence which they lost ; he was still with them by the power of his Spirit : “to the end of the world he will be with his church, so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it :” and he will be with his faithful people who compose that church, to stablish, and to strengthen, and to settle them.

A second reason follows, why the disciples of Christ fasted not.

16. *No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.* .

It was not necessary that his disciples should fast, because the disciples of John and the Pharisees fasted. He was not *putting new cloth to an old garment* : he was making all things new. His

discipline must be a system of itself, not pieced upon the old; and the Jewish dispensation was now old, about to be folded up and changed. It might be expedient for his disciples to fast hereafter, but it was not necessarily so because other teachers had prescribed it. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes free from the law of sin and death." And it would be hurtful rather than profitable to require outward mortification *as essential* to those who were to depend upon Him "for grace to help in time of need." *That which is put in to fill up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.*³

There is still a third reason, derived from the character of his disciples.

17. *Neither do men put new wine into old bottles : else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish : but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.*

His disciples were as unfit to bear austerities, as *old bottles* (old leathern bottles, such as were used in Judea) to bear the fermentation of *new wine*. There must be a suitableness between the person, and that which is applied to him or expected of him. Not to consider this; not to take into account whether the discipline is fitted to the person, or the person to the discipline, would risk the loss of all: *the bottles break, and the wine runneth out,*

³ The more usual interpretation refers both the 16th and 17th verses to the same object, the unfitness of the disciples to receive an austere discipline. It is difficult to extort this sense from the text of verse 16.

and the bottles perish. Wait the proper time, and the gradual preparation of the heart,—*put new wine into new bottles,—and both are preserved.*

Here we must admire, not only the wisdom, but the tenderness of Him, who “taught as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.” He “gathers the lambs in his bosom, and gently leads them that are with young.”⁴ He “has many things to say unto his disciples: but they cannot bear them now.”⁵ At the same time, he would not leave them in ignorance of anything which it were essential for them to know, or suffer them to practise anything which it were unlawful for them to do. The “babes” must have their wholesome, proper nourishment, however simple: the “lambs” must not be left to rush upon danger or destruction. If fasting, and such like mortification, had been absolutely needful to his disciples, he would have prepared them for it, and not pleaded their weakness and their want of experience. But it is not so. It is a preventive of sin, or an humiliation on account of sin; and therefore may be left for its proper season and suitable occasion.

18. *While he spake these things unto them, behold there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.*

19. *And Jesus arose, and followed him; and so did his disciples.*

20. *And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment:*

⁴ Is. xl. 11.

⁵ John xvi. 19.

21. *For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.*

22. *But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her he said, Daughter, be of good comfort : thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.*

23. *And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,*

24. *He said unto them, Give place : for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.*

25. *But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.*

26. *And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.*

We will charitably hope, that many who heard *the fame hereof*, were not so lost in indifference, or in stupid amazement, as to seek no benefit to themselves. He who raised up this young person from the bed of death, would have been no less ready to raise all around her from the death of sin. He who *took her by the hand, and she arose*, would not abandon her, “if she continued in his word :” but would lead her onward, and raise her affections to, and set them on things above.

He will do no less for us also, who “not having seen” these things “have yet believed.” All who are “his disciples indeed,” he takes by the hand, and they follow him : he guides them here by his counsel, and afterwards receives them to his glory.

LECTURE XXIV.

TWO BLIND MEN RESTORED TO SIGHT.— PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL LABOURERS.

MATT. ix. 27—38.

27. *And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.*

28. *And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him : and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this ? They said unto him, Yea, Lord.*

29. *Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.*

30. *And their eyes were opened : and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.*

31. *But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.*

The miracle here related contains, in short compass, a striking description of the nature and the effect of christian faith.

These blind men knew Jesus, who he was, and for what purpose he was come ; for they address him by his prophetic title, the *Son of David*. Therefore they followed Jesus with an earnest supplication, *Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.*

We too, in the first place, must know that Jesus is "he that should come," the predicted Saviour, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." We too must apply to him by the movement of our hearts, desiring the benefit of his atonement, and inwardly saying, *Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.*

He sees whether we believe that *he is able to do this*: whether we believe that he is the appointed way by which we have access to God, and his blood the only atonement by which our sins can be blotted out, and our souls purified. *Believe ye that I am able to do this?* Believe ye that "God has delivered all things into the hands" of the Son? That "as in Adam all died, even so in Christ shall all be made alive?" That "all that believe in him shall not perish but have everlasting life?"

According as in our hearts we believe this, so will *it be unto us*. This is the faith, by which "being justified, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ."

He who performed this miracle, could also tell whether it were best, in this particular case, to *spread the fame of it abroad*, or to let *no man know it*. They, however, who had been restored to sight, were too full of gratitude and joy to keep the secret to themselves. They made it known *unto all that country*.

WE are at liberty to do this: if we find the blessing of an earnest faith in Christ, we may disclose the peace which we enjoy to others, and violate no command. We need not "hide his righteousness within our heart." We should rather ex-

hort all, over whom we have influence, to seek the same benefit and realise the same comfort; that knowing in whom they have believed, they may “commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”¹

32. *As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man, possessed with a devil.*

33. *And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.*

34. *But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.*

The Pharisees, seeing these miracles, and hearing the fame of them, felt themselves obliged to explain them in some way: and prejudice is never at a loss; it can always find some cloke for itself. So in this case, they allowed what they could not deny, *he casteth out devils*; but they persuaded the ignorant multitude, perhaps they were themselves persuaded, that he was in league with Satan; *he casteth out devils through the prince of the devils*. Blind and perverse as they were, they did not consider that it was a good work to cast out devils; and that good works do not proceed from Satan. But the mind which is overspread with prejudice never perceives its own contradictions.

35. *And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.*

36. *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with*

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 19.

compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

37. *Then saith he unto his disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few :*

38. *Pray ye therefore the Lord of The harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*

We have seen, perhaps, a wide field of corn, and a solitary reaper employed in it. Then the grain is shed, and the fowls of the air devour it before it can be gathered in. Such is, too often, the case in spiritual husbandry. Compared with the ignorance, the indifference, the wants of the people, *the labourers are few*, and yet *the harvest is plenteous* ; of these ignorant and careless souls, many perhaps might be reaped and gathered into the heavenly garner, if they were diligently taught and affectionately warned.

How much then has God made to depend on those whose business it is to labour ! It was this which St. Paul felt, when he “taught publicly, and from house to house, and by the space of three years ceased not to warn every one, night and day with tears.” (Acts xx. 20—31.)

Observe, however, that all Christians have a duty in this matter. *Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he may send forth labourers into his harvest.* If the Lord dispose the hearts of men to this service, great will be the zeal and number of those who publish the glad tidings of salvation. And so to dispose their hearts, he may be moved by “effectual earnest prayer.” The frequent exhortations of the apostle, “Brethren, pray for us,” pray “that a door of utterance may be opened

to us," pray "that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified;" sufficiently prove his conviction how much of spiritual success, of the increase of religion, depends on PRAYER. Prayer opens the doors of heaven, and brings down its gifts upon mankind; but no gifts so surely as its best gifts; those gifts which we may ask without scruple and without exception. Other things we seek and pray for, "as may be most expedient for us:" but here we may "come boldly to the throne of grace:" we may seek, with no reserve, both for ourselves and others, "in this world knowledge of the truth, and in the world to come life everlasting."

LECTURE XXV.

COMMISSION OF THE APOSTLES.

MATT. x. 1—15.

(Mark iii. 13. Luke vi. 13.)

1. *And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.*

2. *Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: the first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother: James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;*

3. *Philip and Bartholomew: ¹ Thomas, and Matthew the*

¹ Bartholomew is supposed to be the same as he whom St. John mentions under the name of Nathanael.—(John i. 43—46.)

publican ; James the son of Alphæus ; and Lebbæus, whose surname was Thaddæus : 2

4. *Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.*

(Luke x. 3—16.)

5. *These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not.*

6. *But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

“It was necessary,” in the will and providence of God, “that the word of God must first be spoken” to these *lost sheep*;³ that as many as would listen to the call of the great Shepherd, might return to the fold and be saved. God “remembered his mercy, and helped his servant Israel, as he promised to their forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.”

These *lost sheep* were living in Judea ; were Jews by circumcision and by profession, and probably reckoned themselves exclusively the people of God, secure in his favour. But our Lord denominates them *lost sheep* ; speaks of them as out of the fold : as lost, unless he recovered and delivered them. Let Christians, then, whose outward circumstances now, are what the circumstances of the Jews were then, “to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the promises :” (Rom. ix. 4 :) let Christians beware ; “examine themselves, whether they be in the faith ;” whether they are living the life of faith ; or whether if He, whom they acknowledge as their Lord, as the Jews acknowledged Jehovah—

² Elsewhere called Jude or Judas.

³ See Acts xiii. 46.

if he were again on earth, he would speak of them as *lost*, and find it needful to commission his apostles to restore them.

7. *And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

8. *Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils : freely ye have received, freely give.*

Freely ye have received, as is said, (John xv. 16,) “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” Therefore they were to bestow as gratuitously as they received it, that aid which many would be glad to purchase. It was in accordance with this injunction, that Peter replied to Simon, (Acts viii. 20,) “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.”

9. *Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses,*

10. *Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves : for the workman is worthy of his meat.*

11. *And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy ; and there abide till ye go thence.*

12. *And when ye come into an house, salute it.*

13. *And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it : but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.*

14. *And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.*

15. *Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.*

This passage enables us to understand the manner in which the minds of the people were to be awakened to the message of the gospel. The apostles were to visit whatever place might seem fittest for the purpose, and inquire, who in it was *worthy*: who, among the inhabitants, by his general character and attention to religion, was likely to receive one who came "in the name of the Lord." Here they were to *preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.* "He that should come" is come. God "has remembered his mercy and truth towards the house of Israel." If a proper opportunity offered, they were to *heal the sick, cleanse the lepers*: showing in this way, that they were no false pretenders to the divine commission, but that God was with them of a truth. In every thing, they were to depend on him whose coming they proclaimed: not to provide for their own support, but to trust in the protection of God, whose message they carried. He who moves the hearts of men as the streams of water, could secure them all they needed: in the same manner as he "feeds the fowls of the air" by the arrangements of his providence, or as he still maintains his general promise, that they who "seek first" his heavenly kingdom, shall want nothing which is expedient for them.

We learn from St. Luke, that "the workman" was deemed "worthy of his meat:" that when these apostles were sent forth "without purse and scrip and shoes," they were not suffered to "lack anything." (Luke xxii. 35.) Whoever is found in the clear road of duty, may feel a firm confi-

dence that his steps are marked and secured by the providence of God.

It might prove that they should be kindly received in the house which they entered : or it might prove that they should not be welcomed, nor their message heard. Doubtless their message was attentively heard by many, who did not yet openly join themselves to our Lord ; but who were thus prepared for the more plenteous harvest that should be gathered in, when the doctrine of Christ crucified, and Christ raised from the dead, could be more evidently set forth amongst them. Who can always distinguish the period, when the first seed of truth is dropped into the heart, or fixed there by the grace of the Holy Spirit ? A long and dreary season sometimes passes, till at last the seed springs and grows up, we “ know not how : ” “ first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.”⁴

Christ foresaw, however, that there would be many who “ received the grace of God in vain.” When they departed from these, they were to *shake off the dust of their feet*. This is a figurative action, of a nature common amongst the Jews, by which they enforced their words and illustrated them. As when a certain prophet named Agabus (see Acts xxi. 10) took Paul’s girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, “ Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.” An example is also found in the history of Nehemiah, (v. 12,) who

⁴Mark iv. 28.

writes: "Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise. Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house and from his labour, that performeth not their promise; even thus be he shaken out and emptied." The apostles were to act in the same manner. As we *shake the dust from our feet*, so shall God shake off from his inheritance every man and every city, that receiveth not his message. How they did so, we read, Acts xiii. 51: "The Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they *shook off the dust of their feet against them*, and came into Iconium," Again, (Acts xviii. 6,) "When the Jews opposed themselves, and blasphemed, Paul *shook his raiment*, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles."

It is an awful thought, that there may be such conduct on the part of men, such "hardness of heart, and contempt of his word," as may force God to shake them off, and regard them as his no more: leaving their case worse than that of *Sodom or Gomorrha*, because they have refused brighter light and clearer warning. Those cities repented not at the preaching of Lot. One greater than Lot is here. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

· LECTURE XXVI.

COMMISSION OF THE APOSTLES.

MATT. x. 16—31.

16. *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves : be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

17. *But beware of men ; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues.*

18. *And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.*

It is grievous that the gospel, which is offered as a blessing to all, should become a *testimony against* many. The gospel is a *testimony to all* who live within its influence, of the goodness and mercy of God : if hearing, they will hear, and seeing, they will see. But this *testimony to* them, becomes a *testimony against* them, if they receive it not. “ If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin : but now they have no cloke for their sin.” (John xv. 22.)

19. *But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak : for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.*

20. *For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.*

This assurance and assistance were needful to the first preachers of the gospel, who were “ unlearned and ignorant men,” and would otherwise have been

dismayed, when *brought before governors and kings*. We have an example (Acts iv. 18) of the accomplishment both of the prophecy and the promise. "The rulers, elders, and scribes," called Peter and John before them, and "commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

Christians now, when placed in trying circumstances, ought certainly to prepare themselves, and provide beforehand what they should speak, in a way which was not necessary for the apostles. But they may throw off anxiety¹ in this as well as other things, and "cast their care upon God," and rely on the aid of his Holy Spirit, that with all "boldness" they shall be enabled to "speak the word," that utterance shall be given them, and the grace of him whom they serve prove sufficient for the occasion. This reliance will do more for them than much solicitude.

21. *And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child : and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.*

22. *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake : but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.*

The early history of Christianity shows how all that is here predicted, was literally accomplished. And it has left a perpetual lesson of warning to

¹ *Take no thought* : Μη περιμνήσθητε : Be not over anxious ; as Matt. vi. 25.

every succeeding age. If men have been thus led to do things which *we* know to have been altogether contrary to the will of God, still thinking that they “were doing God service,” how carefully should we all inquire and examine, what manner “of spirit we are of,” lest in any thing we be found “to fight against God!”

23. *But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another : for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not ave gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.*

The explanation of this prophecy may be found in its fulfilment. We are told (Acts viii. 1—4) of “great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem : and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.” Thus was “the wrath of man” turned to fulfil God’s appointment, by causing the gospel to be preached throughout Judea much earlier than in the common course it would have been. And *the Son of man* came :—that is, the visible expression of his vengeance came, the emblem of that greater manifestation, when he shall appear “in power and great glory :”—he came leading the Roman eagles against Jerusalem, before the disciples had completed the circuit of the cities of Judea, “preaching the kingdom of God.”

24. *The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.*

25. *It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household ?*

26. *Fear them not therefore : for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid, that shall not be known.*

Here is the Christian's comfort, if at any time he may find his character reviled, his motives misunderstood, his actions misrepresented. It is no proof that God disapproves or disallows him. "His own Son," "his beloved Son," was evil spoken of and blasphemed, as if in league with Beelzebub. So therefore may *the disciples be as the master was*—so may *the servant be as his lord* ; and yet be the object of complacency and favour with him who is above all, and "judgeth righteously." The Christian, very probably, may not stand in need of this cheering consideration ; "all men may speak well of him : " but should it be otherwise, should his good be recompensed with evil, here is the consolation ready : "the Lord will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart : and then shall every man have praise of God."²

(Luke xii. 2—7.)

27. *What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light : and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.*

28. *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

29. *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing ? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.*

30. *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

31. *Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

² 1 Cor. iv. 5.

Our Lord addressed this to men, who would be forced, in defence of the gospel, to hazard even their lives. Such is not our case. But we must not suppose that no fear of man exists now, because he does not any longer *kill the body*. The fear of man, in one shape or other, causes many to do those things which they ought not to do, and to leave undone what they ought to have done. Family prayer, reverence for the sabbath, abstinence from doubtful amusements, and other signs of a heart devoted to God, are often restrained by the reflection—What will be thought of this, in such or such a quarter? How shall I bear the reproach of that companion, or the ridicule of this friend?

Nothing but an over-ruling sense of an obligation due to God can overcome these feelings now, just as no other motive could have induced the first Christians to stand up and say, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” God has put an awful remonstrance into the mouth of his prophet—“I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?” (Is. li. 12.)

May God imprint that salutary dread upon our hearts. *Fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell!* “Let him be our fear, let him be our dread.”³

³ Is viii. 13.

LECTURE XXVII.

APOSTLES COMMISSIONED AND INSTRUCTED.

MATT. x. 32—42.

32. *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.*

33. *But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*

34. *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth : I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

35. *For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.*

36. *And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*

Our Lord speaks here, not of the intent, but of the effect of his coming. He came to offer peace, the highest peace, with God ; and to promote peace, the sweetest peace, among men. But man's perverseness too often meets the offer of peace with rebellion, and where all should be charity, creates dissension. In early times, when a man embraced the gospel, and professed his faith in Christ, the members of his own family were the first to restrain, and afterwards to denounce him. And we cannot doubt but this opposition would be among the most dangerous snares to a man's conscience. Could he presume to be wiser than his parents ? Could he forfeit the affection of those dearest to his heart ?

In all ages, Christians are sometimes obliged to make sacrifices of this sort for conscience sake. And they are enjoined to make them, for our Lord says,

37. *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me : and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.*

38. *And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*

39. *He that findeth his life shall lose it ; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*

Certainly whoever deserts his duty towards his Saviour because he would otherwise risk the loss of earthly love, cannot *be worthy* of him who for our sakes descended from the glory which he “had with the Father before the world was.” Certainly who ever declines the inconvenience to which his faith in Christ may expose him, whether it be the loss of fortune, or of friendship, or of popular opinion, cannot *be worthy of* him who *took* on his own shoulders *the cross* which was the penalty of our sin. Certainly Peter endangered his soul, when to *find* (or save) *his earthly life*, he denied his Lord. Certainly Paul had *found life* everlasting, when he was “ready not to be bound only, but to die at Jerusalem for the sake of the Lord Jesus.”¹

The expressions are strong, and show that times of religious enmity and actual persecution are first intended, and not the usual course of events. Still the spirit of these passages must be imbibed. To refer them to the time of martyrs only, would show that we have none of that disposition which be-

¹ Acts xxi. 13.

longed to martyrs. It is a truth for all ages and all individuals, *He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me.*

The design of the whole passage is, to admonish the disciples that they must "count the cost" of following him faithfully, for it would be great; and then to encourage them to pay this cost, for great would be the reward. And as this is true perpetually and universally, so it is enforced by an universal declaration: *whosoever shall confess me before men*, in spite of the difficulties or losses he may encounter, *him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever* (through fear of these present trials, or through loss of present advantages) *shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*

40. *He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.*

41. *He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.*

42. *And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.*

As the apostles were going forth upon a mission new and unpopular, there would be many who opposed and rejected them; there would be others who received them with the disposition of Lydia, (Acts xvi. 15,) who "besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she con-

strained us.” This would be a proof of faith and love towards the Saviour in whose name they came : and as such it would be rewarded.

But we must observe the stress which is laid upon the spirit in which such kindness is shown. The prophet must be received *in the name of a prophet*, because he is a prophet. Some might entertain the apostles, because they looked for miraculous assistance from them. If the widow of Zarephath, (1 Kings xvii. 10,) who received the prophet Elijah, had received him only that her barrel of meal and her cruise of oil might not fail, she might have been wise in her generation, and have had her reward here ; but she would not have had *a prophet's reward* in heaven. If Lot had received the strangers in Sodom only that he might ensure their support against the people of the city, he would not have been recorded as one who “ entertained angels unawares.”

So when we apply this passage practically to our own days, we cannot avoid seeing that various motives may cause a disciple of Christ now to be received with favour. The disciples of Christ may appear to be, as they really are, those who can be best depended on in the business of the world. They may be, as relations, those who are most disinterested and self-denying. They may prove, as teachers of religion, those who best maintain order in their neighbourhoods, and most successfully repress such vices as are injurious to the comfort of society. For all these reasons they are valuable ; and for all these reasons they may be valued. But meanwhile they may not be valued on account of

the motives which produce these qualities. They may be despised, rather than esteemed, as *disciples of Christ*. They may be deemed mistaken and enthusiastic in their principles, even while it is acknowledged that those principles make them useful to others. Our Lord, therefore, who “knew what was in man,” distinguishes between this favour, which is of the world, worldly; and the favour which arises from sympathy with the feeling and principles of Christians. *A cup of cold water* shall not be without recompence, when it is given *in the name of a disciple*; that is, as explained by St. Mark,² because they belong to Christ.

This love to the faithful followers of Christ, because they are his followers, is always a characteristic of the sincere Christian; and animates him in proportion as he is really a lover of his Saviour. One whose faith is weak, or cold, or doubtful, has a sort of latent dislike towards those who are more evidently advanced “in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.” One whose faith is active and ardent, finds himself drawn by an instinctive feeling towards all those who are animated by the same spirit.

It is a good test by which to try ourselves. St. John has proposed it when he writes, “Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.”³ Every one that loveth the Father, loveth also the children. Men are dear to us in proportion as they are dear to our friends. “David said, Is there any yet that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”

² ix. 41.

³ 1 John v. 1.

(2 Sam. ix. 1.) When our Lord, from his cross, said to his beloved disciple, “Behold thy mother!” he knew that he was imposing upon him a duty which affection would make delightful. And we may thus learn to put the question to our own hearts, Are we disposed to *receive* men with favour, esteem, and affection, in proportion as we believe that they are “one with Christ, and Christ is one with them?”⁴

LECTURE XXVIII.

MESSAGE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

MATT. xi. 1—19.

(Luke vii. 18—35.)

1. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.*

2. *Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,*

3. *And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*

4. *Jesus answered and said unto them, Go, and show John again those things which ye do hear and see:*

5. *The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*

6. *And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

It had been clearly revealed to John, when Jesus was baptized, that he was “the Lamb of God, which

⁴ Communion Service.

taketh away the sin of the world :” *he that should come*, and “redeem Israel.” But the nature of our Lord’s ministry, as it now appeared, so unlike what John as a Jew expected, may have surprised and perplexed him. And the cruel treatment under which he was himself allowed to suffer, would increase his doubt and embarrassment. If this were the Son of God, would he permit “the messenger who prepared his way before him,” to lie unavenged in prison? These things may have disturbed his faith,—the question implies no more,—and he sent that his doubts might be removed and his faith confirmed. Trials require this, and are often the means by which it is effected.

Jesus merely referred John to the miracles which he was doing, and the prophecies which spoke of him, and were fulfilled by those miracles.¹ These might assure John that this *was he that should come, and they need look for no other.*

Then he added, *Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.* Blessed is he who shall not be offended, because I do not exercise royal power or assume worldly greatness, but grow up as a “tender plant,” a “root out of a dry ground.” Blessed is he who shall not be offended, because I am “despised and rejected of men,” and have “no form or comeliness,” “no beauty that men shall desire me.” For thus was my character described ; and these prophecies might have forewarned you, that “my kingdom is not of this world.”

Let this be *our* support in difficulties and trials. If we meet with them, they do but accomplish that

¹ Isaiah xxx. 6 ; lxi. 1.

which Scripture leads the disciples of Christ to expect as they travel through this world.

7. *And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?*

8. *But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.*

9. *But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.*

10. *For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*

The arrival of John's disciples led our Lord to discourse concerning John, and to declare openly what he was, and what office he bore. He was the messenger of whom it had been predicted that he should *prepare the way* for the Redeemer, by awakening men to a sense of their need of redemption, and preaching, as he did, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Then follows a striking truth :

11. *Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist : notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

As a prophet, taught of God, as "a burning and a shining light" sent to enlighten the souls of men, as God's messenger, bearing a most important office, there had *not risen a greater than John the Baptist*. *Notwithstanding*, the least minister in Christ's own kingdom *was greater than he*.

By *the kingdom of heaven* is not here meant "the kingdom of God" in heaven, the kingdom of heavenly glory ; but the dispensation of the gospel on earth, the kingdom which our Lord was now establishing, which is to lead to heaven. And if we ask why such great things are said of the least minister in this kingdom, we can discover sufficient reason.

John could preach the law, the discipline which leads to Christ as the Redeemer. But the apostles could preach "Christ crucified," who "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law," having borne the curse for us. (Gal. iii. 13.)

John could say, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." But Peter and James could say, "Repent, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

John could exhort, "Bring forth fruits meet for repentance." But the apostles could say, "Yield yourselves unto God, for sin shall not have dominion over you." You shall be enabled to "do all things through Christ which strengtheneth you." "He that has begun a good work in you, shall perform it unto the end."

Such is the superiority which those enjoy, to whom "the ministry of reconciliation" is committed : as was acknowledged by no one more fully than by John himself, when he said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance : but he that cometh after me shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

12. *And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

These are strong expressions, designed to rouse attention by being at first unexpected. The kingdom of heaven *suffereth violence*: “every man presseth into it:” (Luke xvi. 16 :) like a crowd bursting into a house, like an army taking a city. Many seem to hope, without pains or labour, to attain the gift and promise of God: But those who “strive” shall “enter in.” The violent “seize” the kingdom: those who will not be denied, but wrestle in prayer, and labour in mortification.

In this manner, from the days of the apostles to the present hour, *the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence*. All mankind have some object in view, for which they are earnestly contending. May we always have grace to perceive what is really worth our exertions !

13. *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*

14. *And if ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come.²*

15. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

16. *But whereunto shall I liken this generation ? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,*

17. *And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced ; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.*

² God has declared by the prophet Malachi, (iv. 5,) “Behold, I will send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” This promise was now fulfilled. No other than John was meant in the predicted Elias: no other Elias was to be expected: he *is come already*.

18. *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.*

19. *The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.*

Our Lord here demands the attention of those around him. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.* He to whom God has given a head that can understand, a heart that can feel; he that has the sense of a man, the faculties of an intellectual being;—let him use them now, use them on this matter, use them in what concerns his soul and the way of its redemption.

This, however, is too often the last thing on which men will exercise a sound understanding. They are like perverse children, who refuse to be pleased, whether their companions are serious or gay. They will find fault with every way in which religion is represented to them. One while, it is too easy, and gives encouragement to vice: or else it is too severe, and incompatible with the business of the world. So the Jews complained of John the Baptist for his austerity and seclusion; and murmured against Jesus, because he held intercourse with mankind.

In the mean time, *Wisdom is justified of her children.* The wise children are those who see the truth, and pursue it. These approve their own choice, are satisfied with the resolution which they have made, to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” And as these justify wisdom, so does wisdom justify them. It rewards them now

with “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost:” and it will hereafter reward them with “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.”

LECTURE XXIX.

REJECTION OF THE GOSPEL.

MATT. xi. 20—30.

20. *Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.*

21. *Woe unto thee, Chorazin ! woe unto thee, Bethsaida ! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon,¹ they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*

22. *But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.*

23. *And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell : for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.*

24. *But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.*

¹ Tyre is called in Isaiah a “crowned city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth.” (xxiii. 8.) Sidon was also famed for its wealth and luxury. And the destruction of both these cities was foretold by the prophets, as a judgment from God.

25. *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*

26. *Even so, Father ; for so it seemed good in thy sight.*

It appears awful, even to us, when we see men “rejecting the counsel of God against themselves,” and closing their eyes to the *mighty works which have been done* for their salvation. How then must it have appeared to Him, who really and fully knew the value of that deliverance which he offered. He might well leave his testimony against the proud and exalted, the *wise and prudent*, who were confident that they themselves were guides of the blind, (see Rom. ii. 18,) but who really remained in darkness, while the *babes* whom they despised “received the kingdom of God” with the simplicity of “little children.” It seemed good to Him who does all things well, to enlighten these meek and lowly hearers, while “the rich he sent empty away.”

The truly *wise*, however, and the truly *prudent* man, will be the first to receive the gospel. His *prudence* will seek a mode of reconciliation with God: and the reconciliation effected by Christ Jesus will approve itself to his *wisdom*.

27. *All things are delivered unto me of my Father : and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father : neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*

This is not according to common opinion:—*No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.* Most men

suppose that they have a knowledge of God, of his intentions and purposes, quite independently of what the gospel teaches them. Let every one revolve in his mind this short sentence; and inquire, Is it through *the Son* that I seek to know, or hope to *know the Father*? The philosopher may know him to be the Creator of the world: but the knowledge which we need is to know him, not as *the* God, but as *our* God: not as the *universal* Father, but as *our* Father: as having “accepted” us “in the beloved;” and made us his “children by adoption.” Christ *will reveal* him as such to every one who hearkens to the invitation which follows.

28. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

29. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

30. *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Such is the general invitation, which is so refreshing to the *weary and heavy laden*. The last sentence had declared, that the Son alone could reveal a saving knowledge of the Father. But here we learn, that none need perish for lack of that knowledge: their want, their necessity, is the pledge that it shall be given them: *come unto me, all ye that labour*. And who that reflects upon himself by the light of Scripture, does not *labour* and feel *heavy laden*? If he remembers the past, he must say with David, “My wickednesses are like a sore burthen, too heavy for me to bear!” If he looks towards the future, he “sees a law in his members warring against the law of his mind.”

What he requires is the *rest* here promised ; something which he can lean upon. I am burthened with the sense of sin : but Christ has eased me of the load ; “ there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” I am perplexed with the feeling of my infirmities : but Christ has said, “ My grace is sufficient for thee.” And so he *gives me rest*.

Still it is plain, from all reason and from all Scripture, that an effort must be made on the part of every man, to entitle him to this promise ; to let him enjoy this *rest*. And that effort is here described as *taking upon us the yoke*, the service of Christ, *and learning of him*. This every one must consent to do, must make it his choice to do. The yoke is not put upon us whilst we remain ignorant and inactive ; we must take it upon ourselves.

Two inducements, however, are held out ; *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart*. He who gives this invitation, though “ he was in the beginning with God, and was God,” yet stoopeth down to behold the inhabitants of earth, nay, even to favour those whom others overlook : he is *meek and lowly of heart*, not like the Pharisees who spoke of “ the people that knew not the law,” as “ cursed.”

And further, *his yoke is easy and his burden light*. We must not misinterpret this, so as to contradict other words of our Lord, which tell us, that “ narrow is the gate that leadeth unto life ;” that those must “ strive who would enter in ;” which warn us to “ watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation,” for that “ many are called, but few chosen.” The meaning is, that the

commandments of the gospel “are not grievous” to the soul which is purified “by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” (Titus iii. 5.) Neither are they impracticable, through the grace which is “shed abundantly on” the sincere servant of the Redeemer. They are not grievous, but delightful; as to David, when he said, “Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein is my delight.” “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth.” (Ps. cxix. 35, 103.) They are not impracticable, but easy: for we are taught by the experience of an apostle to say, in a career of life far more difficult than any we shall have to run, “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Phil. iv 12.)

In this sense the *yoke* of Christ is really *light and easy*. Those who try it will find it so; and will certainly find the yoke of this world a heavy burthen in comparison.

This is a passage which should lead all to examine themselves, and inquire whether they have received it into their hearts, and taken the invitation home. Blessed are those who can say, I have understood the *labour* and the *burthen* here described, and I have sought the *rest* here promised. The yoke of Christ was imposed upon me when a child, as that which I was to bear through life: I have now taken it upon myself, of my own free

choice and purpose ; and I desire to carry it unto the end. To the “inward man” the *yoke is easy and the burthen is light* ; for “I consent unto the law that it is good ;” and in knowing, from a gracious assurance, that whilst I “abide in Christ,” he will “abide in me,” and that “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death ;” *I find rest unto my soul.*

LECTURE XXX.

SABBATH-DAY.

MATT. xii. 1—21.

(Mark ii. 23—28. Luke vi. 1—5.)

1. *At that time Jesus went on the sabbath-day through the corn ; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.*¹

2. *But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath-day.*

3. *But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him ;*

4. *How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests ?*

¹ To do this was allowed by the law of Moses : (Deut. xxiii. 25 :) “When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand : but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour’s standing corn.”

5. *Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath-days, the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless ?*

6. *But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple.*

7. *But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice,² ye would not have condemned the guiltless.*

8. *For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath-day.*

The Pharisees accused the disciples of profaning the sabbath. Our Lord defends them by showing that the law itself did not forbid things needful; preferred *mercy to sacrifice*; did not intend that a man should perish rather than the letter of the law should be exceeded.

For example, the law commanded that the bread called the *shew-bread*, placed on the altar, should be given, after a certain time, to the priests, and be eaten by them alone: for having been offered to God, it was holy. Notwithstanding, their history told them of a time, when David, being persecuted by Saul and flying from him with his band of men, *was an hungred, and they that were with him*: and in that case of necessity did eat the shew-bread, without blame from his own conscience or from God.

The sacrifice regularly made by the priests was an example to the same purpose. It was ordered in the law, that the priests should sacrifice two lambs on the sabbath-day. This was working; working was *profaning the sabbath*; yet being agreeable to the will of God, *this work* did not profane it.

² Hosea vi. 6. *Supra* ix. 13.

They would not therefore have condemned the guiltless, had they known the merciful character of God, whose main object in preserving life is that men may live to his service and glory. Our Lord, however, takes the opportunity of declaring his own majesty. Here is one greater than the "temple:" here is one who, if he thought fit, might relax the laws which relate to the sabbath. *For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath-day.*

Different transgressions belong to different ages and countries. A formal observance of the sabbath and of outward ceremonies was the prevailing error of the Jews. Christ, therefore, often points out the worthlessness of such forms without the substance of religion. In the present day, offence would be more probably taken on the opposite side. The accusation would be rather directed against one who required the Lord's day to be kept more holy than agreed with common custom. And a "teacher sent from God," we may believe, instead of pointing to instances like those which Christ had occasion to cite, would remind his hearers of passages which promise the favour of God to all who have "kept his sabbaths from polluting them, and made them a delight, holy of the Lord and honourable."³ Certainly there is no surer test of the spiritual state, than the degree of esteem in which the sabbath is held.

(Mark iii. 1—13. Luke vii. 6—11.)

9. *And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue :*

10. *And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-days ? that they might accuse him.*

³ Isaiah lviii. 13.

11. *And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out ?*

12. *How much then is a man better than a sheep ? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath-days.*

13. *Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth ; and it was restored whole, like as the other.*

14. *Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.*

15. *But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence : and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all ;*

16. *And charged them that they should not make him known :*

17. *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,*⁴

18. *Behold my servant, whom I have chosen ; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased : I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles.*

19. *He shall not strive nor cry ; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.*

20. *A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.*⁵

21. *And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.*

This passage of the prophet foretold the quiet, peaceable, and meek character of the Messiah, and agrees with what our Lord affirmed of himself, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." It is here expressly declared, that the Son of God, in whom the Father *was well pleased*, shall win his way silently and secretly ; not as an earthly king or conqueror, who *strives*, and whose procla-

⁴ Isa. xlii. 1—4.

⁵ Till his gospel gains a silent victory over all opposition.

mations are *heard in the streets*: but shall gain gradual possession of the hearts of those who come to him and hear his sayings.

This is illustrated by the proverb, *a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench*. Nothing could require less violence than the breaking a bruised reed, or the quenching of smoking flax. Yet even so much would he not exert.

And this proverb exemplifies the meekness, so does it also the mercy, of the Saviour. The tender conscience of one who is heavy laden with the burthen of sin, is like the *bruised reed*. The Pharisees would have *broken that bruised reed*: those who complained of Jesus, that he ate with publicans and sinners; those who “esteemed themselves righteous and despised others,” would have rejected the first advance of a returning prodigal. For this was one of their offences, “Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” (ch. xxiii. 13.) But the character of Christ was, to “bind up the broken-hearted, to set at liberty them that are bruised;” to say to the contrite, “Go in peace,” and to the penitent, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.”

So, likewise, when flax is smoking, a gentle breath may fan it into a flame; a drop of water will extinguish it. Such is the feeble spark of grace in the heart; soon may it be checked and made ready to expire by the language of severity and haughtiness; but, if encouraged, it may increase to genial warmth and vivid light; may come to be “seen before men,” brightly burning in the service

of God. Despair would be the drop of water, and *quench the smoking flax*: hope would be the gentle breath which revives and nourishes. And the words of Christ are words of hope; "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." His coming, his dying, his living, all preclude despair. His *coming*, assures the soul that it is precious in the sight of God, though rendered vile by sin. His *dying*, secures the ransom: "the strength of the law" is broken, for the penalty of sin is paid. His "*living* at the right-hand of God to make intercession" for us, is a continued consolation, that the pledge of mercy which he has given shall not be in vain; that "the good work which he has begun," shall not be marred by the assaults of Satan, but shall be "performed unto the end," through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Let us then, each for ourselves, fulfil the prophecy, *In his name shall the Gentiles trust*. Let us "trust in his name," in the weakness of youth, in the vigour of manhood, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment. To whom else "should we go? He has the words of eternal life."

LECTURE XXXI.

MIRACLES OF CHRIST. BLASPHEMY AGAINST
THE HOLY GHOST.

MATT. xii. 22—37.

(Mark iii. 20—30 ; Luke xi. 14—30.)

22. *Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb ; and he healed him : insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.*

23. *And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David ?*

24. *But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub,¹ the prince of the devils.*

25. *And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.*

26. *And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself : how shall then his kingdom stand ?*

27. *And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out ? therefore they shall be your judges.*

28. *But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.*

¹ Beelzebub is the name given to a god worshipped by some of the Philistines. The Israelites adopted the name from their idolatrous neighbours, and used it to signify the chief of evil spirits. Our Lord, by his answer, shows that he takes it in the same sense as the word Satan.

The miracles which our Lord wrought, began to have their proper effect upon the minds of the people. They said, *Is not this the Son of David?* “He who should come?” The Pharisees, who denied him to be the expected Son of David, must propose some answer to this; must account for his miracles in some other way. He is in league, they say, with Beelzebub: and so casts out devils, not by his own power, but by agreement with their prince and chief. This, said our Lord, would be like a king conspiring against himself. These are evil spirits, of whom Beelzebub, or Satan, is the head: will *Satan cast out Satan?*

Besides, some of yourselves attempt the same good work: are they too united with Beelzebub? or, *by whom do they cast them out?* No. In this you have a proof, if you had eyes to see, or ears to hear, that what your prophet Daniel has foretold, is coming to pass, and that “the God of heaven is setting up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.” (Dan. ii. 44.)

29. *Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.*

30. *He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.*

Satan is like a strong man: and those who have devils are in his possession. Who can *enter into his house, and spoil his goods*, that is, who can deliver such out of his power, unless he first conquer Satan? It is in this, as in other things; *he that is not with another, is against him.* If I am

not *gathering* for Satan, I am *scattering* and lessening his harvest. And you cannot but see that I am really taking from him, and not adding to his power.

31. *Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.*

32. *And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.*

Our Lord here warns the Pharisees of the danger they were incurring. These miracles were done by the Holy Spirit. To attribute them to Satan, was blasphemy; and such blasphemy as must lead to eternal condemnation. *Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.* We plainly see why this is declared. Without repentance, no sin can be forgiven. But the Holy Spirit alone can lead to repentance. And the Holy Spirit will not convert one who denies his power. Therefore blasphemy against the Holy Ghost takes away all hope of repentance and pardon, because it closes up that channel through which alone repentance and pardon can be conveyed.

On the other hand, it is mercifully said, *Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him.* There might be errors and unbelief relating to Christ, which might afterwards be repented of and pardoned. As in the ensuing chapter it is asked, "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary, and his

brethren, James and Joses, and Simon, and Judas ? Whence then hath this man all these things ? And they were offended in him.” Or as others cavilled at our Lord’s manner of conversation : “ Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” These errors might be cleared up, these hard speeches repented of, and then, like every sin repented of, forgiven. And no doubt many then, and many since, who had once been *offended in Christ Jesus*, have afterwards laid aside their prejudices, and partaken of his mercy.

Concerning the sin of *blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, we may justly observe, that there have been instances of repentance and conversion, even in such as might otherwise have been supposed guilty of it. We might have supposed this, for instance, of Paul himself, had he died whilst he was “ a blasphemer and a persecutor,” “ breathing out slaughter against the disciples of our Lord.” There is reason, therefore, to believe, that the unpardonable blasphemy alluded to must have been confined to that age, and to the particular offence which gave occasion to our Lord’s words—the ascribing to Satan the miracles of mercy which he was daily performing.

Let all scoffers and infidels, however, beware and tremble. All scoffers and infidels do what the Pharisees were doing : they mock at the grace of God, and reject the remedy for sin which he has prepared. But let no meek and contrite heart be dismayed at this sentence. It cannot possibly apply to them. Theirs is the very state which God has promised to receive. (Is. lxvi. 2.) “ To this man

will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Even their fears are a proof that the Holy Ghost has not forsaken them, but is striving with them. They have rather a title to derive comfort from the merciful assurances; *All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men*: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

33. *Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.*

34. *O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*

35. *A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*

36. *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.*

37. *For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*

Our Lord, from this saying of the Pharisees which he had been reproving, is led to remark upon the state of heart which led to it. Their state of heart could no more produce good works or good deeds, than a *corrupt tree* could bring forth *good fruit*. You may graft upon a wild stock, and so *make the tree good and its fruit good*: but remaining as it is, it must continue unprofitable. So must those who uttered such words, unless they "repent and be converted;" for the words betray

the state of heart, as the fruit the nature of the tree. What can a magazine of evil thoughts produce, but an abundance of evil words? And for all such words *men shall give account at the day of judgment*. No other evidence will be needed of what the heart has been. *For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*

If this last were the only text in scripture, how grievous would our case be! Who could bear to let his final condition stand or fall by *his words*, or anything else of his own? Strictly speaking, by the merits of Christ we are *justified*; and according to our trust in him, we are “accounted righteous before God.”² “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ.” But the reality of our faith, the soundness of our heart, is proved by its fruits; and amongst its fruits, by our words. Make the faith good, and the fruit will be good. In this sense, *by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned*. In this sense, “death and life are in the power of the tongue.”³ In this sense, “if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.”⁴

Lord, “there is not a word in our tongue, but thou knowest it altogether.” “O keep our tongue from evil, and our lips that they speak no guile!”

² Art. xi.³ Prov. xviii. 21.⁴ James iii. 2.

LECTURE XXXII.

SIGN OF JONAS.

MATT. xii. 38—50.

(Luke xi. 29—36.)

38. *Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.*

39. *But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas;*

40. *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly: so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

Signs enough were daily given to the Jewish people, in the words of wisdom which were spoken, if they had ears to hear, and in the mighty works of power that were done, if they had eyes to see. One more sign remained to be shown, which as yet they could not comprehend. The scriptures related, that when Jonah the prophet was sailing to Tarshish in opposition to the divine command, a tempest arose, and threatened to sink the ship in which he had embarked. Conscience-struck, he said to the sailors, (Jonah i. 12,) "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea: so shall the sea be calm unto you." "So they took up Jonah, and

cast him forth into the sea ; and the sea ceased from her raging." "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." After which "The Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."

To this *sign* our Lord compares his own death and resurrection. In the cause there was no resemblance. Jonah, by his own disobedience, occasioned the anger of God, which he expiated. The resemblance is in the event : Christ consented to be "cast forth," to "give his life a ransom for many." And Christ, like Jonah, should be three days hidden from the sight of men, should by all be given up as lost, and should rise again on the third day from the depths of the grave.

Let this be a sign to us also. Let us provide that when we go down to the grave, we who shall likewise rise again, at the appointed time, "to stand before the Son of man," He may prove a Saviour to us, who himself died, and was buried, and rose again.

41. *The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it : because they repented at the preaching of Jonas ; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*¹

42. *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it : for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon ; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.*²

See Jonah iii. 4—10

² See 1 Kings x. 1—9.

(Luke xi. 24—26.)

43. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places,³ seeking rest, and findeth none.*

44. *Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out ; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.*

45. *Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there : and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.*

This sad description is applicable either to the case of an individual or of a nation. Our Lord, however, on this occasion, alludes more particularly to the Jewish people, speaking of them as of one man. They had been growing worse and worse, in spite of many advantages. They had been purified by the Babylonish captivity: the power of Satan had been weakened for a time: *the unclean spirit* might be supposed to have *gone out*: but any reformation which had followed this chastisement had been transient: no sign of it remained; they were again corrupt, exceedingly corrupt, as a people; and they were now signally showing their corruption by rejecting the Messiah.

This state is here traced to Satan as its cause. Any individual, or any national reform, is a conquest over the power of that *unclean spirit*. He may be expelled for a time, or he may *go out*; relax his temptations “for a season;” but we know

³ *Dry places.* The idea is suited to an Eastern country, and is taken from the case of one wandering in a sandy desert, where, through want of water, all is waste and barrenness.

that he will not lose his victim without a struggle; he will watch his opportunity: he will *find no rest*: all *places* will be *dry* and unrefreshing to him, till he return, if possible. As we read in the history of Job, “The Lord saith unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.”⁴ And St. Peter acquaints us with the object of this restlessness, saying, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.”⁵

When then, thus “going to and fro in the earth,” he *finds a house* which he had left, *empty, swept, and garnished*; that is, when he finds a heart ready prepared for his reception, unprotected by divine grace, unfortified by sound principles, and exposed to him by remaining evil habits; he returns again with increased power, as if *seven*, or many, *wicked spirits* were present instead of one; *and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*

This was, undeniably, the case with the Jewish nation. “Light had come into the world.” But they had shown that they “loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” They “would not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprovèd.”

We may say the same of Judas, as an individual. As an apostle, he must have worn the outward appearance of a religious character. He must have

⁴ Job i. 7.

⁵ 1 Pet. v. 8.

“done many things,” as Herod once did, in the way of obedience and duty; and we can hardly suppose that he had not felt many strong compunctions. Still the heart was kept prepared for Satan, as a house that is *swept and garnished*, to receive a guest on his return. His covetous disposition remained unchanged, his dishonest practices were not altogether abandoned:⁶ and therefore he was ready to yield to the grand temptation, when “Satan entered into him,” and led him to final destruction both of body and soul.

We must never forget the power of Satan. But we must equally remember the promise, that if we “resist the devil, he will flee from us.” Resolve to do this, being “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” You may then depend most upon his protection, when you feel your own weakness most sensibly.⁷ But “let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”

(Mark iii. 31—35. Luke viii. 19—21.)

46. *While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.**

47. *Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.*

48. *But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?*

49. *And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!*

50. *For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*

How graciously is this narrative introduced, as a comfort after the alarming sentences which had

⁶ See John xii. 6.

⁷ 2 Cor. xii. 10.

just preceded! Our Lord declares that he looks upon *his disciples*, upon *whosoever shall do the will of his heavenly Father*, in the endearing light of nearest relationship. How certainly, then, will he deliver from all the power and all the snares of Satan, those who are really desirous to “purge themselves from dead works,” “to serve the living God!” How justly may we feel confident, that he will “keep what we have committed to him, unto the great day!” “For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with our infirmities,” or was ignorant of the malice of Satan; “but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”⁸

LECTURE XXXIII.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

MATT. xiii. 1—23.

(Mark iv. 1—20. Luke viii. 4—15.)

1. *The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.*

2. *And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.*

⁸ Heb. iv. 15.

3. *And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow ;*

4. *And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up :*

5. *Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth : and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth :*

6. *And when the sun was up, they were scorched ; and because they had no root, they withered away.*

7. *And some fell among thorns ; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them :*

8. *But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold.*

9. *Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

10. *And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables ?*

11. *He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.*

12. *For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance : but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.*

This sentence, which taken by itself might be hard to understand, is explained in the parable of the talents, where the same words occur. (Matt. xxv. 29.) There a talent had been given to a slothful servant, who "hid it in the earth:" made no use of it. Such was the case of the Jewish nation. Spiritual advantages had belonged to them, which had belonged to no other people: and now they were withdrawn, having been long neglected and abused, as the talent was taken from the unprofitable servant who buried it, and given to the diligent servant who had made the most of what was en-

trusted to him. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? "when to *him who hath, shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, hath nothing to show in return for all the means of grace which he has enjoyed, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.*

13. *Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.*

14. *And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:*

15. *For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

16. *But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.*

17. *For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*

Many of the *prophets* desired to understand, more fully than was possible for them, the nature of the Messiah's kingdom which they were instructed to foretel: and *righteous men* may have anxiously "waited for the consolation of Israel," to whom it was not given, as it was to Simeon, to "see the salvation" of God.¹

18. *Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.*

19. *When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catch-*

¹ See Luke ii. 25, &c.

eth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

20. *But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it ;*

21. *Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while : for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*

22. *He also that received seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word ; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.*

23. *But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it ; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*

An awful description is here given of the different effect of the same seed, according to the soil it falls upon. The word is the same : the whole difference is in the heart : as in natural husbandry, the crop depends upon the soil, and the preparation which it has undergone. There are some soils in such a state, or so barren in themselves, that no experienced person would expect a return from them. They are so stiff, or so sandy, or so rocky, or so overspread with weeds and briers, that no corn can be produced there : so are there some hearts, of which, remaining as they are, we can entertain no hope. They are so stiff, and prejudiced, that they will not receive the seed at all : or they are so light, or so stony, that the seed sown finds no strength, or room, or substance to root in.

Instead of dwelling now upon these barren soils,

let us consider the right state of heart—the *good ground*. The description here given of the good ground is that, having *heard the word*, it *understandeth it*, and *beareth fruit*. As seed will be thrown away unless the land is suitable for its reception, so the heart must be in a certain state of preparation, or the word will not profit it. It must be in a teachable, unprejudiced frame, like that intended by our Lord, when he said, “Except ye receive the kingdom of God as a little child, ye shall in no wise enter therein.” Unless there is some tenderness, and humility, and sincerity, the truths of the gospel will not penetrate or take root, so as to bring fruit to perfection.

For example. Some of the Jews, when they heard our Lord’s words, satisfied themselves with the easy answer, “Look and see; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet:” or said, “He has a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?” Of the Athenians, “some mocked,”² when Paul preached to them the resurrection, and the life of the world to come. These hearts were like the *way side*.

Others of the Athenians said to Paul, “We will hear thee again on this matter:” and another set among the Jews “believed on Jesus; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.”³ Here was seed falling upon *stony places*.

The apostles, however, “left all, and followed him.” Instead of taking offence, like others, they said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” So at Athens, likewise,

² See Acts xvii. 32, &c.

³ John xii. 42.

“certain men clave unto Paul, and believed.” Theirs then was *good ground*, which *heareth the word and understandeth it ; and also beareth fruit*. The sower doth not always sow in vain.

And he has a further reason for hope, that though he may now “go on his way weeping,” still he may return with joy, and “bring his sheaves with him.” In nature there are *soils* which cannot be amended: the clay, the sand, the rock, will never repay the husbandman. But there are no *hearts* which cannot be amended. Man has to do with the soil, and his power is limited; but God has to do with the heart, and his power has no limit; and produces such a change in the lightest, the hardest, the most unreclaimed and uncultivated ground, “that it may bring forth fruit unto holiness, and the end, everlasting life.” Who so light and unstable as the apostle Peter? now saying, “Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee:” and a very short time after affirming with an oath, “I know not the man.” Who so slow to conviction as the apostle Thomas? Who more prejudiced than Saul, “a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious?” Yet what a change in these soils, under the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit! How bold did Peter become! Thomas, how faithful! Paul, how zealous! how eager to convince his countrymen that there was no salvation except through that name which he had so long blasphemed? Thus proving that what is impossible with man, is possible with God: who, where he sees fit, can make what was useless profitable, and what was barren fruitful.

Those who are to teach and those who are to learn, must equally bear in mind that “the preparation of the heart is from the Lord:” that his grace must soften the ground that it may receive the word sown. For “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”⁴

But while a consciousness of this makes you distrust yourselves, and sends you to earnest prayer, still remember, and be comforted by the remembrance, that the Jews were rejected because they were wilfully *dull of hearing*, and *their eyes they closed, lest they should be converted*. God beholds from „ afar off” the heart which is ready to take in the seed of truth; and heaven and earth shall pass away, sooner than one penitent or simple soul shall perish for lack of knowledge.

LECTURE XXXIV.

PARABLE OF THE TARES.

MATT. xiii. 24—43.

24. *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:*

⁴ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

25. *But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.*

26. *But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.*

27. *So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?*

28. *He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?*

29. *But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*

30. *Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.*

31. *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:¹*

32. *Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.*

33. *Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

In the two last of these parables, the gradual but sure progress of the gospel in the world is described. When our Lord was now sowing the word, it was indeed *the least of all seeds*; but under the fostering care of God, it has *become a tree*, stretching forth its branches into the most distant lands, and giving shelter to multitudes. So likewise in its origin it might be justly compared to *leaven hid in three measures of meal*. It was, at first, *hid* in a remote

¹ Mark iv. 30—32.

province of the Roman empire. But, like leaven, it gradually penetrated and pervaded the mass of heathenism, and rendered a large portion of mankind useful and valuable, fit for the purposes of Him by whom the leaven came.

“O Lord, how marvellous are thy works,” both of nature and of grace! In wisdom hast thou done them all.

34. *All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:*

35. *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet,² saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.*

36. *Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.*

37. *He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;*

38. *The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;*

39. *The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.*

40. *As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.*

41. *The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;*

42. *And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

43. *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

² Ps. lxxviii. 2.

The special object of this parable is to show, that in the world, and even in that part of the wide field of the world where the Gospel is planted and flourishing, God permits to grow up together unto the harvest, *the righteous and the unrighteous*;—*the children of the wicked one*, those who follow the works of Satan, and *the children of the kingdom*, those who are living for his everlasting kingdom, and for whom it is designed. This is exactly what we see: the good and the bad mixed together in the same congregation, in the same family, in the same service, in the same business; living together, conversing together, working together, trading together. And it is easy to perceive how this answers God's general purposes respecting mankind.

1. It suits his purpose as regards *the righteous*. It furnishes the trial of their faith; it proves their sincerity in his sight, and in the sight of angels, and in the sight of men; it shows whether there be such a heart in them, that they will stedfastly keep his commandments, instead of following a multitude to do evil. We may lament indeed that tares have grown up where good seed was sown; that the corn is liable to be overrun by them; that the righteous should be endangered by bad example and hurtful persuasion. But this is not a perfect world, either in nature or in grace: it is sadly defaced by the consequences of sin. *An enemy hath done this*: has corrupted man; has brought sin into the world which had been created "very good." Therefore we are obliged to "*strive* to enter in at the strait gate;" therefore must we *labour*, that we may obtain: and it is one part of our labour and our diffi-

culty, to resist the secret contagion of worldly men, and the open profaneness of the wicked. Such is the general ordinance : first toil, then victory. Our Lord himself showed what must be the lot of his followers : he did not enter upon his ministry, till he had first encountered and overcome the *enemy* : He “himself suffered being tempted.” Shall the disciple be greater than his Master, the servant than his Lord ? No—the trial of our faith “worketh patience.” “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.” “To him that overcometh, I will give to sit with me on my throne.”

2. Further, that the tares are suffered to grow up with the wheat until the harvest, answers the purpose of God’s will with respect to the unrighteous. It is a continued reproof of their corrupt ways ; a continued call to repentance and conversion. In every situation, in every walk of life, there are faithful disciples of “the Lord who bought them,” witnesses in the world for God and his righteousness : these silently warn the bad by their example, and are ready to assist them by their counsel.

For I must here point out the difference between the tares in nature, and the corrupt men with whom they are compared in the parable.³ In nature, nothing can change a weed into valuable

³ This, whether they admit it or not, is not generally remarked by commentators. But it seems very obvious. Paul would certainly have been rooted out as *a tare*. M. Henry well observes ; “It is not possible for man to distinguish between tares and wheat, but what he may be mistaken. The tares, if continued, may become good corn ; therefore have patience with them.”

corn ; but it is not so in the world of grace. Divine power is daily performing such miracles—is converting the tares into wheat, the followers of Satan into the followers of God. And the apostles often urge it on their disciples as an additional reason for a blameless and holy life, that others may be led to seek the same grace which had converted them. St. Peter writes, “Have your conversation honest among the Gentiles ; that whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Pet. ii. 12.) And again, “Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands ; that if any obey not the word, they may also be won by the conversation of their wives ; when they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.” (1 Pet. iii. 1.)

Thus a glorious object is set before all, who have taken upon them their Saviour’s yoke, that they “adorn his doctrine” by their temper, their charity, their uncorruptness, their consistent practice. They may, perhaps, “convert a sinner from the error of his way, and save a soul from death.” There is no weed so rank in itself, or so noxious to the crop, but it may become, through grace, both beautiful and useful, fitted for the garner of the heavenly husbandman.

Indeed all that is now most promising among the wheat, had once the nature of tares : the *good seed*, the *children of the kingdom*, were children of Adam, like the worst among us. They have either been improved early, by the gracious care of their Saviour, nurturing their tender years by

an education according to the gospel,—or they have even been far gone, perhaps, in actual trespasses and sins: so that one beholding them years ago, might have been ready to say with the servants in the parable, *Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?* The Lord, however, spared them for a time; and by the power of his grace the tares have become wheat.

That change may take place in all. Christ has made atonement: the gospel is ready to instruct, the Holy Spirit to aid, and God to receive the penitent: nothing is wanting but the will on their part to “cease to do evil and learn to do well.” May “the Lord” so shed abroad his Spirit amongst us, as to “add to his church daily such as shall be saved!”

LECTURE XXXV.

TREASURE REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL.—NET CAST INTO THE SEA.

MATT. xiii. 44—58.

44. *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.*

45. *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls :*

46. *Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*

These comparisons are both to the same effect ; and are intended to point out, by a familiar example, what will be the conduct of those who have *found the kingdom of heaven* ; that is, who are led by the Spirit to “lay hold on eternal life,” as disclosed to us by Christ Jesus in the gospel. They will *sell all that they have*, to secure that treasure. They will never rest, unless they have obtained by faith an interest in him who offers it ; nor unless they are maintaining that interest “by pureness, by knowledge, by kindness, by love unfeigned, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.” Such was the conduct of those, who, like the apostles and their converts, were first called to be heirs of the heavenly inheritance : and such must be the conduct of all, in every age, to whom the offer of salvation is not made in vain. In one sense, indeed, they are not required to sell all that they have ; they are not required to leave father and mother, and wife and children, and lands and country, and even life itself, like those who first discovered the pearl of great price, and lighted on the hidden treasure : but they are equally required to leave whatever separates their hearts from Christ, or interrupts their complete obedience to the will of God.

Alas ! how few have learnt the lesson so plainly taught in these parables !

If we survey the ways of men we observe that

some, instead of making religion *everything*, treat it as *nothing*: "God is not in all their thoughts:" they seek "their portion in this life." Pleasure, or gain, or honour, or some object which this world offers, is the only pearl they prize, the only treasure they know or value.

Others cannot be said to treat religion as *nothing*, for they do pay some attention to it. They make it a *little thing*; an occasional business; a Sunday duty, which requires a few thoughts, or a few forms in the week or in the year, that it may not be entirely neglected. But how does this agree with the doctrine of Him, whom alone we can trust in this matter? For do such occasional thoughts, or does the observance of certain outward ordinances, answer the description here given of those who *found a treasure*? who *having found one pearl of great price, go and sell all that they have and buy it*? Such practice might be safer, if we were told that eternal life were a treasure which we could not help stumbling upon; or a pearl which might easily be picked up as we pass along the beaten road of this present evil world. But he who is "the truth," speaks very differently. He says that those alone are wise who make religion the *chief thing*. And let those who are making it so, who are really "seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," take this parable for their support and encouragement.

If a man had sold all that he had, in order to be in possession of some treasure which he valued more than all, it could not fail to be manifest to himself and clear to others. So it ought to be

evident concerning every one called Christian, that he counts all other things as dross, for the sake of securing that eternal life which is “the gift of God through Jesus Christ.”

47. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind :

48. Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

49. So shall it be at the end of the world : the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

50. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

The gospel is cast into the world, as a net is cast into the sea. The net brings up all within its reach, but all it brings is not worth preserving. So wherever the gospel is professed in a country, and becomes the national religion, many belong to it nominally who do not really believe its doctrines, or obey its precepts. This is sufficiently evident from the practice of the world around us. But further, even of those who make profession of faith, some have always been found who “call” Christ “Lord, Lord,” but “do not the things which he says.” The apostles tell us, how soon this was verified in the church. “There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision ; whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.” (Tit. i. 10, 11.) “There are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of

God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Jude 4.)

“It must needs be that offences come.” Such is the advantage which Satan takes of human corruption. “But woe unto him by whom the offence cometh !” When *the net is full*, in God’s appointed season, *the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just*. For though now the tares and the wheat are suffered to grow up unto the harvest, “there shall in no wise enter” into the heavenly kingdom, “any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie ; but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (Rev. xxi. 27.) How carefully, then, and how constantly, should we “examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith : and prove our own selves !”

51. *Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things ? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.*

52. *Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*

The apostles were to be *scribes*, commissioned to instruct others unto the kingdom of heaven : and therefore requiring to be *instructed*, and to *understand all these things* themselves. Their task was difficult ; they would need every help to perform it, and unless it were supplied, as in their case, by the Holy Spirit, must have a treasure of knowledge provided ; the materials of long study, thought, and experience. As in Ecclesiastes we read, “Be-

cause the preacher was wise, he taught the people knowledge."

(Mark vi. 1—6.)

53. *And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.*

54. *And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?*

55. *Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?*

56. *And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?*

57. *And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.*

58. *And he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.*

What is here said of the neighbourhood of Nazareth, is equally true of the whole Jewish nation. Christ received least *honour in his own country*. "It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken unto them;" but they "put it from them:" whilst "the Gentiles were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord." (Acts xiii. 46—48.) The nearness of the means of grace is not always a reason of their being most valued. But it will be a reason why, of all "the children of disobedience," those lie under the heaviest condemnation, of whom it may be said, "the kingdom of God is come nigh you."

It has come nigh us "in word:" may it be also "in power."

LECTURE XXXVI.

HEROD'S CONSENT TO THE DEATH OF JOHN
THE BAPTIST.

MATT. xiv. 1—13.

(Mark xv. 14—32. Luke ix. 7—9.)

1. *At that time Herod¹ the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus,*

2. *And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist ; he is risen from the dead ; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.*

3. *For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.*

4. *For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.*

5. *And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.*

If the motives of men's actions were always seen as plainly by us, as they are by Him who knows the heart, how little would there often be to praise in those which are much commended ! Perhaps Herod's clemency had been admired, because, though John told him an unwelcome truth, he spared his life. But he was considering himself, not duty. He *feared the multitude*, and would not risk his popularity.

6. *But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.*

¹ This Herod was surnamed Antipas ; and was son of him who had been king when Jesus was born. His dominions were divided among his four sons : and Judea was allotted to this Herod, who is therefore called *the tetrarch*, or ruler of the fourth share.

7. *Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.*

8. *And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.*

Such is sin, when allowed to have dominion; lust, adultery, hatred, malice, murder. We should say it changes the nature of women, when it leads to such a demand, if we did not know that all these "proceed out of the heart," when the heart, instead of being renewed in righteousness, is permitted to indulge its natural corruption.

9. *And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.*

10. *And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.*

11. *And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.*

12. *And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.*

13. *When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by a ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities.*

In this history of John Baptist's death, we find Herod, a man in supreme power and subject to no outward control, consenting to a deed which his conscience opposed, from which his reason revolted, and his inclination dissuaded him. *The king was sorry.* St. Mark says, "exceeding sorry:" and adds the reason; that "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly." Indeed, it is certain that his consent must have cost him much.

For such was the impression which John's holiness had left upon his mind, that as soon as he heard of the miracles of Jesus, he expected that it had been the same John risen from the dead, who was performing these mighty works. It is instructive, therefore, to inquire what led him to act in this manner against his conscience and his reason.

For his oath's sake, and them that sat with him at meat, he sent and beheaded John in prison.

Had the oath been lawful, undoubtedly he would have been bound by it, and could not observe it too sacredly. David praises the man who "swear-eth to his neighbour, and disappointeth him not, though it be to his own hindrance." But if one has been led by his own rashness, or by another's deceit, to make an unlawful oath, the evil is in keeping it, not in breaking it. He was bound by a previous obligation to God, not to transgress his commands.

But the true cause remains behind. For his oath's sake *and them which sat with him at meat.* Herod, though in power, was governed by the fear of man. He would not be thought to have any tenderness of conscience, any dread of that Being of whom John had discoursed to him. He was afraid lest those who surrounded him should think that he favoured *a just man and a holy*, who declared himself a prophet sent of God. So he complied with the cruel demand, *and sent and beheaded John in the prison.*

This is by no means the only instance related in scripture, where persons in high stations are induced to act contrary to their better judgment, con-

trary even to their own inclinations, by their fear of man. Darius (see Dan. vi. 14, &c.) was betrayed by his courtiers so far as to pass a decree which led to the condemnation of Daniel, the object of their jealousy. "The king was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him." Nevertheless, being urged by the chief persons of the realm, "he commanded, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions."

So Pilate, in the case of our blessed Lord, most unwillingly consented to his execution. (John xix. 1—12.) He was "afraid;" he openly declared his innocence; "he sought to release him;" but the Jews cried out, saying, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar." "When Pilate heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and delivered him unto them to be crucified."

The conduct of all these three governors is the same. They all saw cause to venerate those, whom the people required them to deliver up to death: they all saw, that in consenting to gratify the people, they were acting cruelly and unjustly; and they had an indistinct view that they might draw upon themselves the anger of Him who is above all, King of kings and Lord of lords. Yet they all obeyed man rather than God, and preferred present interest to every future consideration.

Learn hence, what a poor creature is man, when he is not under the influence of the Holy Spirit. If reason could determine him, the reason of

Herod, and of Pilate, and of Darius, was right; if conscience were sufficient, their conscience solemnly warned them on which side duty lay. But Darius feared his courtiers, and Pilate feared the emperor of Rome, and Herod feared the opinion of those who sat at meat with him : and their worldly fear was stronger than conscience or reason.

The Holy Spirit, which strengthens all who “seek first the kingdom of God,” can alone endue a man with power to obey his reason and his conscience, to act a firm and consistent part, and to “overcome the world.” And this it does through “the word of the truth of the gospel.” “For who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God ?” That faith alone supplies such motives and such means as effectually dispose and govern the heart, and enable it to “look not to the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” That faith alone teaches us to discern what Herod could not discern, the objects which are really to be desired and sought, and the objects which are really to be feared and avoided.

LECTURE XXXVII.

A MULTITUDE FED.—PETER'S CONFIDENCE.

MATT. xiv. 14—36.

(Mark vi. 34—56 ; Luke ix. 10—14 ; John vi. 1—20.)

14. *And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.*

15. *And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past ; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.*

16. *But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart ; give ye them to eat.*

17. *And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.*

18. *He said, bring them hither to me.*

19. *And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.*

20. *And they did all eat, and were filled : and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.*

21. *And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.*

It is not, therefore, beneath the regard of those who minister in the word, to consider the bodily wants of the people under their charge. They must not be tempted to “leave the word of God, and serve tables :” but the necessities of the very

indigent are almost as great an obstacle in the way of religion, as the riches of the very opulent.

22. *And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.*

23. *And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray : and when the evening was come, he was there alone.*

24. *But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves : for the wind was contrary.*

25. *And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*

26. *And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit ; and they cried out for fear.*

27. *But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer ; it is I ; be not afraid.*

28. *And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.*

29. *And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.*

Peter showed here, what on other occasions appears to have been his natural character—a mixture of boldness and weakness, of sincerity and irresolution. *Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.* This was placing himself in a way of unnecessary trial, as much as when he followed Jesus into the high priest's palace, and mixed himself among his Master's bitterest enemies. Still, then he showed the same earnest zeal, and here he showed the same courage and confidence, which afterwards fitted him to be a main pillar of the infant church. Not being equally called for, it was followed by a check and a reproof :

but it was in its nature the same faith as that which is so highly approved in Abraham, when "he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform."¹ So Peter considered not the nature of the element into which he was venturing, but was fully persuaded of the power and faithfulness of him to whom he confided his life.

In this dependence, he came down out of the ship, and walked upon the waters. Two hands upheld him; the hand of Christ's power, the hand of his own faith; neither of them would do it alone. The hand of Christ's power laid hold on him; the hand of his own faith laid hold on the power of Christ. Had not Christ's hand been powerful, that faith had been in vain: had not his faith been strongly fixed on Christ, that power had not been exercised for his preservation.²

30. *But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.*

31. *And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*

●

"Oh the imperfect composition of the best saint on earth: as far from pure faith, as from mere infidelity!" Here was a portion of the same excellence and the same weakness, which afterwards

¹ Rom. iv. 19.

² Bp. Hall.

showed itself in a scene more resembling ordinary life. The same ardent zeal, which saith, *Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the water*, said also, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee both to prison and to death." No doubt Peter thought this and meant this, as sincerely as he intended to venture upon the waves. But within a very few hours, *seeing the wind boisterous, he was afraid*: seeing his Master in the hands of his enemies, seeing that he exerted no power to deliver himself, "he denied him, saying, I know him not."

The book of Daniel gives two well-known examples of faith, which did not fail in the hour of great temptation. Daniel himself, and the "three children of Israel," who refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, were clearly called to undergo the fiery trial: and being so called, they were strengthened to endure unto the end, as innumerable others have been, animated by the same faith, and therefore supported by the same Spirit from above.

It is not more needful to remark the failure of Peter's faith, than what follows, the mercy of his Lord and our Lord. *Beginning to sink, he cried, Lord, save me*. His faith, though feeble, was clear: he "knew in whom he had believed, and that he was able to keep what he had committed to him." And his Lord, too, knowing his sincerity, had pity upon his weakness. *Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?* Wherefore didst thou doubt my willingness, or my power, "to deliver the

godly out of temptation?" Peter afterwards, when strengthened by a fuller measure of the Holy Spirit, did not doubt, but pursued a steady, even, and resolute course of zealous labours in his Master's cause. The very trials which he had met with, and which showed him at the same time his own weakness, and the strength which he might depend upon, and which "is made perfect in weakness,"—contributed to the formation of that character, which, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we so justly admire. No doubt this is one reason why the believer in Christ is often permitted to remain in trying circumstances, that he may learn to depend upon the "grace which is sufficient for him."³ Sometimes it has seemed best to the providence of God, that even to those who are faithfully engaged in his service there appears no glimpse of comfort: they are as the disciples on their voyage: the night dark and long, the wind contrary, the waves tempestuous. Yet, in all these difficulties and extremities, their gracious God intends nothing but his greater glory and theirs: the triumph of their faith, the crown of their victory. Faith is confirmed, when it is exercised; and circumstances are allowed which call it into exercise, that it may be confirmed.

32. *And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.*

33. *Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth, thou art the Son of God.*

34. *And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret.*

³ 2 Cor. xii. 2. The whole context, from verse 1 to 10, strongly illustrates this passage in Peter's history.

35. *And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased :*

36. *And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment : and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.*

Such was the compassionate mode in which it pleased our Lord to manifest his divine nature. We ought to reflect with gratitude, that “his glory has abated nothing of his mercy. He is still the sure and bountiful physician, who heals all our diseases, and takes away all our infirmities. The people of Gennesaret were easily induced to beseech his aid in favour of their sick friends : and if we would have recourse to him in our spiritual maladies, it would be as impossible that we should be without help, as that he should be without power and mercy.”⁴

LECTURE XXXVIII.

CORRUPTION OF THE HEART.

MATT. xv. 1—20.

(Mark vii. 1—23.)

1. *Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,*

⁴ Bp. Hall.

2. *Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders ? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.*

3. *But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition ?*

4. *For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother : and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.*

5. *But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me ;*

6. *And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.*

Our Lord instances, by one notable example, the way in which the Pharisees, and such-like interpreters of the law, had perverted the commandments of God. The law, which required children to *honour father and mother*, of course required that they should provide for them, if able, as the lowest evidence of honouring them. To elude this duty, the Pharisees allowed that portion of income which should be so employed, to be devoted as *a gift*, a gift intended for the treasury of the temple in which the Pharisees were interested. And the payment of this gift (called by St. Mark *corban*) exempted a man from the necessity of assisting his parents.^e

¹ Die utterly.

² Mark vii. 11. It is said to have been a custom of Jewish usurers, when they met with a tardy debtor, to transfer the debt to *the poor's box*. Then the debtor was obliged to pay, or to appear cruel to the poor, and impious towards God. This illustrates the practice alluded to in the text.—*Origen ap. Bulkley. Quoted by Bloomfield, Recensio Critica, in loco.*

7. *Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,*
8. *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips ; but their heart is far from me.*
9. *But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*
10. *And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand :*
11. *Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man ; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.*
12. *Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying ?*
13. *But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.*
14. *Let them alone : they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*
15. *Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.*

It is so much easier, and costs so much less self-denial, to observe certain ceremonies, and even to submit to certain privations, than to control the heart and mortify sinful desires, that there is always a tendency in man to treat such observances as piety. The Mahometan, who knows not what it is to govern and subdue his passions, will be scrupulously exact in prostrations, in ablutions, and in formal repetitions of prayer. And the apostles, it seems, had been so accustomed to attach importance to these outward things, that they could not conceive them to be no necessary part of real religion : they could not understand that the observance of them did not recommend a man to God, or the neglect of them defile him. *Declare unto us this parable.*

16. *And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?*

17. *Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?*

18. *But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.*

19. *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*

20. *These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.*

Out of the heart proceed murders. The first murder, for example, proceeded from envy and malice, which had got possession of the heart of Cain. "Wherefore slew he Abel? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."³ It was not then the weapon stained with his brother's blood which defiled Cain: nor would the water which might cleanse his hands from that defilement wash away the guilt which he had contracted. It was the envy and malice of his heart which really polluted him.

Pilate washed his hands before the multitude, requiring them to attest that he was "innocent of the blood of the just person" whom he allowed them to crucify. But the real stain was in his heart, when he sacrificed conscience, duty, and justice, to his supposed interests in the world, lest he should be accused of not being "Cæsar's friend."

"Judas, which had betrayed Jesus, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I

³ 1 John iii. 12.

have betrayed the innocent blood. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed.”⁴ “And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful to put them in the treasury, because it is the price of blood.”

But it was not the thirty pieces of silver which defiled Judas, or would have defiled the Pharisees, if they had put them in the treasury. Judas was defiled by the covetous heart out of which *thefts proceed*, and which sought every opportunity of gain : and it was rancorous malice, and deep-rooted prejudice, which defiled the Pharisees, when they persecuted him who told them that their deeds were evil.

The defilement, therefore, is at the source ; at the seat of malice, and envy, and hatred, and covetousness, and adultery, and blasphemy. The heart is the fountain which sends forth the polluted stream. Not because God made it thus : but because Adam corrupted it. From the sinful parent the sinful offspring is derived. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh :” is “very far gone from original righteousness,”⁵ and requires to be renewed after the image which has been defaced, in which it was at first created.

To effect that renewal, Christ came into the world : and he does effect it, in all who “receive him.” The Spirit of God “dwells in them,” “leads” them, “guides them into all truth.”⁶ They have still a heart from which those evils would proceed which *defile a man* : the corruption of nature

⁴ Matt. xxvii. 3—6.⁵ Art xi.⁶ Rom. viii. 9.

remains even in them that are regenerate. But they “mortify the deeds of the body, through the Spirit;” they keep down the risings of envy, and pride, and jealousy; they “set their affections on things above;” they cultivate those better principles, and they show the fruits of those better principles, by which it is seen that “if any man is in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature;” “old things are passed away;” that is, things that are natural to his heart, and would be allowed in his practice, if he were left to himself, are exchanged for higher desires and heavenly views. And thus they are gradually prepared to leave a state of being, in which, after all, so much remains that is polluted, vile, and unsatisfactory; and to begin a glorified state of “spirit, and soul, and body,” in which “nothing shall enter that defileth, or worketh abomination.”

All this depends upon the heart: out of it “are the issues of life.” But the state of the heart can only be known by what proceeds out of it: by the words which it prompts, by the thoughts which it suggests, by the practice which it influences. Examine and judge yourselves by these, the sure token of what is within: and make David’s prayer your own, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”

LECTURE XXXIX.

THE SUCCESSFUL FAITH OF THE CANAANITISH WOMAN.

MATT. xv. 21—39.

(Mark vii. 24—30.)

21. *Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.*

22. *And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.*¹

23. *But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.*

24. *But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

It was part of the design of God, that the offer of salvation should be first made to the Jews, his chosen people. So our Lord commanded his twelve disciples, not to “go into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans; but to go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”² And Paul and Barnabas told their countrymen, “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken unto you.”³

¹ St. Mark says the woman was a Greek, or a Syrophœnician, by nation: *i. e.* she was a Gentile.

² Matt. x. 5.

³ Acts xiii. 46.

25. *Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.*

26. *But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.*

27. *And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.*

28. *Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

The account of this miracle has at first a different appearance from most others. Commonly Jesus granted his mercy almost before he was entreated: as soon as he saw the multitude, he took pity on them, and healed their diseases. But this miracle seems an exception. The woman comes, entreating that her daughter may be restored. Instead of immediately receiving what she desired, she is at first repulsed; repulsed in words which look like harshness. *I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.* At last, however, we perceive the reason of this unusual delay. *O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee according as thou wilt.* It was to try her faith; to exhibit her faith; and to show the reward of faith. For his own satisfaction it could not be necessary to prove her faith. "He knew what was in man:" and foresaw the event of the trial. The case resembles that of Abraham, when "God tempted" him, and commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, his only son. The obedience of Abraham, like the obedience or disobedience of every living man, was foreknown to God. But nothing

could have exhibited that faith to us except his really issuing the command, and Abraham's actually complying with it.⁴ Jesus also, in the present instance, might have granted this woman's request at once. But then neither his disciples at the time, nor they who have since believed through their word, would have seen the importance and the reward of faith. The example of this woman is set forth as a specimen of approved and successful faith, wherever the gospel is made known.

The answer was given to her, *O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.* This is, then, exactly the answer which we desire. *Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.* That we may receive the answer, we must possess the qualification. *Great is thy faith.* It was this faith which obtained mercy. We desire the mercy • let us show the faith.

Her faith is marked by two particular characteristics: HUMILITY and PERSEVERANCE.

First consider her HUMILITY. She hears the answer, *It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.* The "adoption pertains" to the Israelites: you "sinners of the Gentiles," are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise."⁵ A spirit like that of the Pharisees might have been offended

⁴ Compare Deut. viii. 2. "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no."

⁵ Eph. ii. 12.

at this saying : and even a less arrogant spirit might have asked, Is this he who is "meek and lowly of heart," who offers rest to all the "heavy laden?" This woman, however, answered not again, except in the gentlest terms of meekness and submission, *Truth, Lord.* I feel that I have no claim : that I am "less than the least of all thy mercies : " but in thee all fulness dwells : thou canst bless all, even us "that are afar off," and yet leave none unsatisfied of those that are "nigh."

Let the same meek and humble spirit be found in every christian heart. It was the spirit of the accepted publican ; it was the spirit of the penitent on the cross ; it was the spirit of St. Paul, who owned himself "the least of all the apostles, who was not meet to be called an apostle ;" it will be felt by all, who rightly understand the truth, that "not according to works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us."

Imitate also her PERSEVERANCE. This woman must have been enabled by the providence of God to learn that a Deliverer was to come into the world, and that Jesus was he. Her address is, *O Lord, thou Son of David* ; the known title which described him as *Lord*, to be *God* ; as *Son*, to be man ; as the *Son of David*, to be the Messiah who "should come." Such must be the basis of all real and persevering faith : "Truly this man was the Son of God."

But the Deliverer is silent : *answereth not a word.* Still *she crieth after him.* His disciples intercede, that she may enjoy the mercy so boun-

tifully bestowed on others. Still unsuccessful, she approached nearer, *and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me!* Once more repulsed, she perseveres, and her suit is obtained.

So there may be many things which it may be proper for a Christian to ask, but which our Lord may not at first see fit to grant. He may choose to “trouble” him “to know what is in his heart,”⁶ before he permits him to rest from the assaults of Satan, from the motions of sin which are in his members: or before he fills him with that “joy and peace in believing,” which is certainly not possessed in an equal degree by all who are, nevertheless, equally reconciled to God, and beheld by him with favour.

Instead of complaining, as if this contradicted the assurance, “every one that asketh, receiveth;” let the Christian imitate the importunity of this Canaanitish woman, and “continue instant in prayer.” “Only let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.”

29. *And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.*

30. *And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and he healed them:*

31. *Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.*

32. *Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue*

⁶ Deut. viii. 2.

with me now three days, and have nothing to eat : and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

33. *And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude ?*

34. *And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye ? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.*

35. *And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.*

36. *And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks ; and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.*

37. *And they did all eat, and were filled : and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.*

38. *And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.*

39. *And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.*

Our blessed Lord, by the compassion with which he relieved the bodily wants of the people, has left a perpetual evidence of his mercy and of his power. Surely all may expect to “receive of his fulness,” when they dwell on this example ; surely he who refused to let the multitude depart fasting, lest they should faint on their return, will not send “empty away” any one soul which “hungers and thirsts after righteousness.”

LECTURE XL.

LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES.—PETER'S CONFESSION.

MATT. xvi. 1—20.

(Mark viii. 11—21.)

1. *The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.*

2. *He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather : for the sky is red.*

3. *And in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day : for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky ; but can ye not discern the signs of the times ?*

4. *A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.*

5. *And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.*

6. *Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*

7. *And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread.¹*

8. *Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread ?*

¹ The apostles did not penetrate beyond the *literal* interpretation, and the word *leaven* reminded them of their want of *bread*. A similar error is related in John iv. 32. Jesus had said, "I have meat to eat, which ye know not of." "Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him aught to eat?"

9. *Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?*

10. *Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?*

11. *How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?*

12. *Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*

Whether the meal shall be useful or unwholesome, depends on the quality of the *leaven* which is mixed up with it. So the character of man depends upon the principles which govern him. And false principles corrupt the heart, as completely as bad leaven spoils the meal into which it enters. Therefore was there reason to *beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees.*

(Mark viii. 27—30. Luke ix. 18—21.)

13. *When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man, am?*

14. *And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.*

15. *He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?*

16. *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

17. *And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

Many mistaken notions, we see, prevailed concerning our Lord: and Peter might have been deceived by them, as well as others. But he had been preserved from such errors; and had been enabled to see that Jesus bore all the characters of

the true Messiah. When others who beheld his miracles, instead of being convinced by them, uttered blasphemies, and ascribed them to Beelzebub, Peter was not thus perverted, knowing well, that as the fruit was good, the tree must be good that bore it: "a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit," neither could "the wicked one" perform works of mercy. When others were offended at the doctrines which they heard, and murmured, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" Peter openly confessed, and declared, "Thou hast the words of eternal life."

This was the right heart, the proper disposition; not cavilling and contending, but "receiving the word with meekness." And we are here assured that such a disposition is derived from the Spirit of God. *Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* Now God had not revealed the truth unto Peter by a special vision or declaration, or in any other way than he had manifested it to the rest of the people who had seen Christ's miracles and heard his word. But Peter had received the truth with readiness of heart and will, when others had disputed and denied it. And this willing and faithful heart is the gift of the Spirit. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Those who "receive" Christ, and "believe in his name," are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."²

² John i. 13.

Therefore when our Lord heard Peter make that clear confession, *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*, he knew at once that this was God's doing: that the Spirit had wrought this conviction; had taken away the "evil heart of unbelief," and given the tender heart of humility and faith and love. *Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee.* Flesh and blood could not have taught thee this lesson; for no man can implant faith in another: flesh and blood would have taught thee a different lesson; would have led thee to doubt and dispute, or would have made thee shrink from this avowal. *My Father which is in heaven* has taught thee to submit and believe; and, therefore, *blessed art thou.* Thy faith shall save thee.

The fact is clear, both from Scripture and from experience, that no man can rightly believe Jesus to be *the Christ, the Son of the living God*, but through the influence of the Spirit. This truth may be abused; but it is not less the truth, or less needful to be understood. What, therefore, are you to do? What, but pray to Him from whom the Spirit proceeds, that he may give and preserve to you the same heart and faith which he gave to his apostle, and which entitled him to be called *blessed*. And never suppose that you can pray for this faith in vain. It would be impious to think so. For it would be judging worse of God, than of an earthly parent. Our Lord has himself taught us this argument; "Shall ye, being evil, give good gifts to your children, and shall not your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

Pray then for yourselves, and for all, that a deeper sense may be granted you of what you owe to Christ Jesus : that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him : the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to them that believe.” (Eph. i. 17, &c.)

18. *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

19. *And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

20. *Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.*

Peter had avowed the fundamental truth on which the church of Christ is built : the truth which in all ages, instead of being vanquished by Satan, has prevailed against the *gates of hell*. Peter had also, by that confession, shown himself suited to become a pillar of that church. The question is, which is to be considered as the *rock* ; Peter himself, or the truth which he had uttered. It seems more natural to ascribe this term to the individual Peter.³ *Thou art Peter* : a name which is by

³ That the *church of Christ* should be built on the *acknowledgment of Christ*, seems here to bear too much the appearance of a truism, to be so solemnly pronounced. The case is different with

interpretation "a stone;" on thee, as a corner stone, a foundation stone, *I will build my church*, a church which shall stand for ever. Peter certainly did become such a corner stone: the rising church rested upon him as its chief support for many years: and he laid the foundation of it at the day of Pentecost, when there "were added to the church three thousand souls," and instead of a party of apostles, it became a body of Christians. On that occasion, he exhibited *the keys of the kingdom of heaven*; he disclosed the doctrine, which "opens the kingdom of heaven to all believers." On other occasions, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, he proved himself endowed with a knowledge of the heart, which enabled him to *bind or loose*, to pardon or condemn.

We may remember, however, that it was not his successful eloquence, not his apostleship, not his special gifts, which drew forth the declaration of a remarkable blessing from our Lord: it was that which may equally belong to every Christian, his clear understanding and confession of Jesus *as the Christ the Son of the living God*: the avowal professed in the words, "Thou art the King of glory, O Christ; Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father."

us now, when we select as a leading article of faith out of many others, the divinity of Christ, or justification through Christ. This, however, will appear in different lights to different readers.

LECTURE XLI.

PETER REBUKED.—NECESSITY OF SELF-DENIAL.

MATT. xvi. 21—28.

(Mark viii. 31—38. Luke ix. 22—27.)

21. *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.*

22. *Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.*

23. *But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

We may observe, that our Lord uses the same words here to his beloved disciple Peter, which he employed towards Satan himself in his temptation in the wilderness: *Get thee behind me, Satan:* and thus intimates in what light even the nearest friends are to be viewed, when they stand between us and duty. The things which Peter would have recommended, were, in the opinion of man, more suitable to the character of the Messiah. To the taste and feelings of man, too, they must needs be more agreeable than what it was ordained that Christ should suffer. But this was the judgment of the flesh, not of the Spirit. And the great business of religion is to bring our own judgment and inclination and preference to conform to the will and wisdom of God. This is the proof of the

Spirit of God dwelling in us. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh:" they *savour the things that be of men*. "But they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit:" they *savour the things of God*.

24. *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

25. *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it.*

26. *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

27. *For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*

28. *Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*¹

A very important declaration is here made, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*. And it is necessary to inquire, how far this warning is applicable to Christians generally. For, without doubt, the apostles and early disciples were called to *deny*, that is, to give up and renounce, *themselves*, in a manner which can only belong to times of persecution.

Yet does the phrase, in different degrees, apply to all persons and all times. The christian faith is essentially a religion of self-denial.

1. It is so, first, because every Christian re-

¹ By this phrase, *the coming of the Son of man*, the destruction of Jerusalem is often expressed, which John, if not others of the apostles, then *standing here*, lived to witness.

nounces all self-righteousness, all confidence in himself, or in anything he has done or can do, and looks upon his salvation as the work of his Redeemer. He purposes to be, and in the main he is, obedient, and just, and holy. But he considers his obedience, his integrity, his holiness, not as *grounds* of pardon, or acceptance, but as *evidences* of them. And this is self-denial: self-denial, to some minds, of most difficult attainment. Probably it was so to St. Paul, who says, “What things were gain to me,”² what I once valued and relied on, “those I counted loss for Christ.” “I was alive, without the law, once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”³

2. Secondly, every Christian is called to self-denial, in renouncing his own will, and submitting it to the will of his heavenly Father. If man had remained innocent, if Satan had not prevailed, God and man, like the Father and the Son, would have had but one will. But being now perverted and corrupted by sin, our wills incline towards the evil which they ought to hate, and turn away from the good which they ought to choose: and at last, are only brought with difficulty to acquiesce in what God sees best, provides for us, or allots to us. Self-love, self-indulgence, self-preference, prevail. We pursue our own inclination, not God’s honour: we neither love what delights him, nor hate what displeases him.

The gospel is intended to bring us back to a state of agreement with God; and to lead us to

Phil. iii. 7.

³ Rom. vii. 9.

inquire, not what may gratify our own feelings and wishes, but what God will admit and approve. A choice we must have, as reasonable creatures : but that preference must give way to the commands and decrees of God. Our blessed Lord expressed a preference, when he said, “ Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me.” But he left us the example of the truest self-denial, when he added, “ nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.”

3. A third branch of a Christian’s self-denial is, that renouncing all ungodliness and worldly lusts, renouncing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, he strives to “ perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.” That this is no easy sacrifice, is too plain : plain from the self-indulgent habits which too many allow themselves ; plain from the endeavours which have been made in all ages, to reconcile faith in Christ with the indulgence of some favourite and besetting sin : which led St. Paul to say, after condemning such iniquities—as if he foresaw the arts of evil teachers, and the readiness of the heart to be corrupted—“ Let no man deceive you with vain words : for on account of these things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience.”

I am aware that all this self-denial is its own reward :—that a practical reliance upon Christ is the only sure repose which the soul can enjoy ;—that a submission of our own will to the will of God, is the oil which smooths all the troubled waves of life ;—that “ the carnal mind” is at enmity with itself as well as “ enmity against God,” and that to “ be spiritually-minded is life and peace.” But

it would be contrary to all truth and all experience, to pretend that such a life can be entered upon, or such a state of heart attained, without constant and resolute self-denial. Our Lord well knew this : and therefore, when he uttered the warning, he adds a consideration which ought to overcome all the resistance of natural corruption. *What shall it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* Because no reasonable person would consent to *deny himself, and take up his cross*, without a sufficient motive ; he therefore adds a motive which may well be deemed sufficient. What shall it profit a man, though he may gain present ease, and present enjoyment, though he may escape vexation and trial, what shall it profit him if he be cast away at last, and make shipwreck of his soul ? *For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*

Here then is the reason why all should exercise themselves, to renounce the besetting sins of their age, their station, their disposition. Even if that self-denial be tribulation in this world, it will be incalculable profit in the end. It will repay the poor man for mortifying his discontent, his envy, and for acquiescing in the lot which the wisdom of God assigns him. It will repay the rich man for mortifying his worldly desires, “ the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.” It will repay the young for mortifying their carnal appetites, their vanity, their dangerous pleasures. It will repay the elder for mortifying their peevishness, their selfishness, their

unchristian tempers. It will repay the sensual for “crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts;” and the covetous for learning to be charitable. It will repay all for renouncing their self-dependence, and committing themselves to the “only name under heaven, whereby they can be saved.” For whosoever takes up his cross, and follows Christ here, in the way of humble and obedient faith, shall follow him to glory hereafter, when he *comes in his kingdom*.

LECTURE XLII.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

MATT. xvii. 1—13.

(Mark xi. 1—13; Luke ix. 28—36.)

1. *And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,*

2. *And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*

3. *And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.*

Our Lord Jesus appeared on earth in an humble condition. As the prophet had foretold, he was as a root *out of a dry ground*: not fair and flourish-

ing to the eye : there “ was no beauty in him ” that men should desire him. He came as a sacrifice for sin : and therefore he came in humiliation. So that men must have to conquer some prejudices ; must open their minds to truth, and rise above the common opinions of the world, before they could confess as Peter did, “ Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

It accorded with the usual dealings of God with men, that such faith should be rewarded, and therefore strengthened : should be fixed on a foundation, which, however shaken, might not be finally overthrown. Therefore our Lord took those three whom he honoured with peculiar regard, and *brought them up into a high mountain apart*, and manifested to them his glory : the glory which he had with his Father, before the world was. *His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.* St. Mark adds, “ so as no fuller on earth can whiten it.” A simple account of what could not be adequately described. Nothing on earth, nothing seen by mortal eyes, can equal the brightness.

So when Paul, for the same purpose, “ was caught up into the third heaven,” all he tells us is, that he “ heard words ” “ which it is not lawful,” not possible, “ for man to utter.”¹ He heard what cannot be conveyed to our imaginations. We read in the book of Revelation, that St. John was likewise permitted to enjoy a heavenly vision.² St. John, too, saw what he compares to all that is on earth most bright, most rich, most beautiful, but which our

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 2—4.

² Rev. iv.

minds are incapable of conceiving. St. Paul heard words which man is unable to repeat: and here the three apostles are dazzled with a brightness which could be produced by no earthly skill.

How wonderful and how inspiring is the thought, that this brightness, this glory, is prepared for those, who here belong to Christ Jesus! St. Paul assures us, that he “shall raise our vile body, that it may be made like unto his glorious body.” Christ was “made flesh,” as ourselves: he bore the body of earth: the body of “weakness:” of “dishonour.” And so do we. “As is the earthy, such are they that are earthy.” We bear the image of the earthy. But on the mount where this wonderful transfiguration took place, Christ put on the appearance of “incorruption,” of “glory,” of “power:” the glory and power of the celestial body. So likewise will his true and faithful disciples. “As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.” “And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” This will take place at that last hour, when “the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed: when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality!”³

This we believe: Lord, “help our unbelief!” and teach us more and more to live as those should live, who look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come!

Moses and Elijah, we are told, appeared on this scene, *talking with Jesus*.

³ See 1 Cor. xv. 42 – 54.

Here some may be disposed to ask, How were these dead raised up; and with what body did they come?

It is enough to answer, God gave to them a body as it pleased him: and to each, his own body. “Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

4. *Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*

Such was the wonderful glory of this scene, and such the rapture in which Peter viewed it, that he could not bear the thought of leaving it, and returning again to common things: to the business and trials of life; its cares, its sorrows, its temptations. And all would feel the same; would desire to “depart,” and to “be with Christ,” if their faith were more pure and entire, so as to realize to their minds what Scripture discloses and promises.

But at least we may unite with the apostle in these words, *It is good for us to be here*: to be where he was, and where he wished to remain, in the company of Christ Jesus, and of Elias, and of Moses. We are with Moses and Elias, while we walk, as they walked, in all the ordinances and commandments of the law blameless. We are with Christ Jesus, while we abide in his faith. He is one with us, and we with him. He has said, “If any man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

It is indeed *good for us* to be so. May we never be where Moses and Elias might not also be : never act unworthily of such presence : never desire what they might not favour, or do what they might be ashamed to witness, or speak what they would be grieved to hear !

5. *While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them : and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye him.*

6. *And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.*

7. *And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.*

8. *And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.*

As soon as the apostles had recovered from the surprise occasioned by the *voice from heaven*, they looked round, and perceived no longer Moses and Elias. In the same manner, short glimpses of heavenly things are sometimes vouchsafed to the people of God during their pilgrimage on earth : thus they are cheered on their way, and strengthened to pursue it. Those more especially who are called to encounter great difficulties, to suffer heavy trials of sickness and sorrow, or who are exposed to grievous persecution for righteousness' sake—those more especially are permitted to enjoy such blessings. The Spirit gives them, not a view of Moses and Elias, but a sense of everlasting glory, which enables them to do what they are called to do, and to suffer what they are called to suffer.

But those unusual favours are not lasting. It is intended that our life on earth be by *faith*, and not by *sight*. We must, here, depend upon God's word: depend upon what he promises that we shall behold hereafter, and not expect that it will now be clearly displayed before our eyes.

9. *And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.*

10. *And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?*

11. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.*

12. *But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.*

13. *Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.*

The interpreters of the law were right in expecting, that one typified under the title of Elijah, (see Mal. iii. 1; iv. 5,) "a burning and shining light in a dark age and country," should precede the coming of the great deliverer. But they had not perceived that this prophecy was already accomplished in the ministry of John the Baptist. He had *restored all things*; that is, he had established them in the state in which they must needs be when Christ appeared: he had called men to repentance, the first step towards restoration, and awakened the hearts of those who had ears to hear.

The error of the apostles reminds us, how much of the meaning of Scripture, how much of its spiri-

tual force, how much of its personal application, may remain unperceived, unless, through the grace of its Divine Author, it is brought home to our minds. May he so “open our eyes” that we may see the wondrous things of his law !

LECTURE XLIII.

POWER OF FAITH.—TRIBUTE MONEY PAID.

MATT. xvii. 14—27.

(Mark ix. 14—29. Luke ix. 37—43.)

14. *And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,*

15. *Lord, have mercy on my son : for he is lunatic, and sore vexed : for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.*

16. *And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.*

17. *Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you ? how long shall I suffer you ? bring him hither to me.*

18. *And Jesus rebuked the devil ; and he departed out of him : and the child was cured from that very hour.*

19. *Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out ?*

20. *And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief : for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of*

mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place ; and it shall remove ; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

21. *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.*

It is instructive here to see what the disciples wanted. Vigorous, strenuous, effectual faith. Faith they possessed : they had left all, and followed the calling of the Messiah. But it was not such faith as they required : faith which can overcome all obstacles and temptations ; faith which can wrestle with God in prayer and supplication ; faith which can come boldly to the throne of grace ; faith of which afterwards St. James understood the real value, when he wrote, “Let a man ask in faith, *nothing wavering.*” Such faith, we are here warned, can only be produced and preserved in the heart *by prayer and fasting* : by persevering habits of earnest devotion, and by abstraction from worldly thoughts, desires, and pleasures.

It is not sufficiently observed, that what all want is FAITH. Not to cast out devils, but to subdue evil inclinations, and overcome evil practices. If men *had faith as a grain of mustard seed*, (ever so little, but still having life in it,) they would not be turned aside, as they are, by the slightest difficulties and temptations. How few deny or doubt that God created the world—that Christ appeared in human nature to redeem mankind—that he will come again to judge the quick and the dead ! Yet how few live as if they *did not doubt* this ! whilst they practise what the Creator has forbidden, what Christ came to redeem them from, what they ac-

knowledge that he will judge them for. Because it is not all belief that reaches and influences the heart; and because other things, things of this world, intervene, and keep out of our thoughts a belief in God, in Christ, and life everlasting.

What then we need, is a livelier faith in things which we do believe and do acknowledge: a livelier, a more abiding faith: such a faith as shall make us act in conformity with it; such a faith as the apostles had when they said to the cripple at the gate of the temple, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk:" and such a faith as they had not, when on this occasion they failed to cure the lunatic: such a faith as Peter had, when in the passage lately under our consideration, he leaped down into the sea to meet his Lord, fully trusting in his power to save him; and such a faith as afterwards he had not, when finding the waves boisterous, he gave way to fear, and "began to sink." What we need, is such a full reliance upon all that God has revealed to us in his word, as shall make us live by that word; make us think by it, hope by it, fear by it, trust by it, speak by it, act by it. When we reflect how far we are from really living by that word, which yet we know to be God's word, and profess to follow, we must perceive that what we require is faith—faith that is constantly present, and lively in its exercise: that if we had *faith as a grain of mustard seed*, the exceedingly vast objects of that faith must have a visible and perpetual influence upon every thought and action.

It is through faith that the Christian is enabled to "run with patience the race which is set before

him," and to oppose the enemies of his salvation. Are we endangered by sinful example? Faith represents the example of those who have resisted sin: of Noah, and Lot, and Joseph—exceptions to the wickedness by which they were surrounded. Are we endangered by the corrupt maxims which prevail in the world? Faith brings to our mind the opposite maxims which abound in the word of God. Are we endangered by the pleasures of this present time? Faith brings before our eyes the joy unspeakable and full of glory which the heart of man cannot rightly conceive, but which God has prepared for them that love him. Faith recalls to our thoughts the peace of God which passeth all understanding, which arises from a sense of reconciliation with Him. Faith whispers, shall I give up comfort like this, for mean and temporary gratifications? Are we restrained from a conscientious practice by the thoughts, or words, or scorn of others? Faith raises our hearts to Him that is above, whose thoughts are not as man's thoughts, and who never judges that any man can love him too fervently, or serve him too faithfully. Are we assailed by the corruptions of our hearts, which suggest to us the pleasures of sin? Faith declares that such "pleasures are but for a season," and will be followed by misery which knows no end. Are we tempted by the secrecy of sin? Faith assures us that the eye of God sees everywhere.* Does sin promise gain or advantage? Faith asks the fearful question, "What shall it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Therefore, if we had *faith as a grain of mustard seed*, we should be able to make progress in our religious course, as the apostle says all Christians ought to do: "walking by faith and not by sight;" considering things eternal, not things temporal, and "having our conversation in heaven."

22. *And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men :*

23. *And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.*

24. *And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute ?*

25. *He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon ? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute ? of their own children, or of strangers ?*

26. *Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.*

27. *Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up ; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money : that take, and give unto them for me and thee.*

This is an example of the manner in which the precept may be obeyed, which we read in the sermon on the mount: "If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." The christian spirit inclines a man to waive his own privileges, rather than occasion offences or dispute.

The tribute was paid for the use of the sanctuary: therefore it was paid to the King of heaven. The

Son of that King could not be required to pay tribute, according to the known maxim, that *kings of the earth take not tribute of their own children. Notwithstanding*, said our Lord, *lest we should offend them, give unto them for me and thee.*

This is the spirit which was recommended by St. Paul, when disputes had arisen among the early Christians. (1 Cor. vi. 7.) “Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity seeketh not her own.”

“Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”

LECTURE XLIV.

HUMILITY RECOMMENDED.—DANGER OF CAUSING WEAK BRETHREN TO OFFEND.

MATT. xviii. 1—14.

(Mark ix. 33—42. Luke ix. 46—48.)

1. *At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*

2. *And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,*

3. *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

4. *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

The time to rebuke sinfulness, is when its effects show themselves. These prove what is in the heart. There is nothing in this question of the apostles which betokened a meetness for the kingdom of heaven, or a desire of such meetness. So our Lord takes the opportunity, and inculcates a lesson of humility. And, according to a custom often practised by the prophets, he enforces his precept by an emblematical sign. He calls a little child unto him, and sets him in the midst, and says, *Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* Children care nothing about honours or precedence, because they do not understand them, and are not aware of what may be gained by them. Christians must disregard honours and precedence; not indeed from ignorance of their earthly value, but because their "affections are set upon things above," and because they have a low and modest opinion of themselves.

But how does this example agree with the corruption which we know to belong to the human heart, and which therefore exists in childhood? It does not contradict it. The seed or the root may be an illustration of one thing, and the grown plant or tree of another. Pride, and the love of personal aggrandizement, is natural to the human heart, inasmuch as all selfishness is natural to it. As soon as we come to understand that precedence is desirable for the sake of what it procures, then

precedence is coveted. But the Christian learns to “look not on his own things,” but to consider also another’s advantage: he is also conscious to himself of his own demerit, and therefore he is “in honour preferring another.” Except he be thus *converted*, he *shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*: and in this sense, the apostles still required to be *converted*. In one sense, they were already converted: their hearts had been turned from this present world, to “seek first the kingdom of God.” But though this is done, all is not done: much remainder of sin adheres, which “goeth not out but by prayer and fasting,” by persevering watchfulness, and, it may be, by needful rebuke and frequent chastening.

5. *And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.*

6. *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*

7. *Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!*¹

The mention of humility, leads our Lord to consider the humble state in which his disciples shall be; the rudeness with which they will often be

¹ The meaning of the word *offence* and *offend*, must be borne in mind through the whole of this passage. An offence, is an occasion of falling from the faith. To offend, is to give one, who might otherwise walk uprightly before God, an occasion of stumbling.

pushed aside in the confusion of the world ; and the tender concern with which he will interest himself in their welfare. He calls them here, *the little ones that believe in him* : *little* in their own eyes : *little* in the eyes of many around them : humble, poor, simple, often despised characters, but known to him who “ knows his sheep,” and dear to him who “ loves his own.” Probably he was looking forward to the persecution which he knew awaited these : he knew how they might *be offended*, led into occasions of sin, or even turned aside from the faith, by the bad example of corrupt friends, or the persecution of avowed enemies : and such circumstances as those which drove the believers from Jerusalem, and such characters as that of Saul, were in his view, when he said, *It must needs be that offences come !*²

It must needs be that offences come ! Such is the course of this world, such the corruption of the heart, such the power of Satan, that much must be expected to occur, which will make the way of eternal life narrow : not always easy to find, and always difficult to keep. But *woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh* : woe to him who by oppression or opposition deters others from embracing the faith ; or who, by conduct unworthy of his profession, gives occasion of exultation to the enemies of God.

The expression here used, bears a very awful form ; and ought to imprint on every mind a just horror of the consequences of sin. No common evil could be apprehended, if we were to say con-

² Acts viii. 1—4.

cerning a child which had excited its parent's anger—Woe to that child ; it were better that he should die suddenly at this moment, than that he should meet his Father's anger.

And this mention of the grievous consequences of sin, naturally leads to the self-denial which must be used, in order to avoid, or conquer sin. The earthly treasure must be sacrificed, the desire subdued, the gain resigned, though they be dear as a hand, or valuable as an eye.

8. *Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee : it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.*

9. *And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee : it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.*

10. *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones ; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*

11. *For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.*

12. *How think ye ? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray ?*

13. *And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.*

14. *Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*

What is here declared, *their angels do always behold the face of my Father*, does not necessarily imply that a particular angel is attached as guar-

dian to every individual of these *little ones*: but merely confirms what Scripture elsewhere reveals, that the angels who dwell in the presence of God, are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.”³

And the argument runs thus. Angels watch over them: shall man despise them? Are they *little ones*? Are they tender in age, humble in condition, or is their faith still weak and wavering? Yet they are not to be despised. Their helplessness does not disparage them in the opinion of their Saviour. Nay, it recommends them to him. *For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.* And ought any to be lightly esteemed, whom he has thus taught us to value? “Through thee,” through thy opposition, or thy seduction, or thy neglect, “shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?”⁴

Further, God looks upon them, now that they are brought into his fold, as a shepherd looks upon a sheep which had gone astray, and been recovered. How then will he resent it, if one be afterwards decoyed away: be either left to perish through neglect, or wantonly destroyed! *For it is not his will that one of these little ones should perish.* He suffers them indeed to undergo temptation, and fall into various trials. It is part of the plan on which he governs the world. But he watches over them and supports them; and has “a crown of life” in store for them, if they “endure unto the end.”

³ Heb. i. 14.

⁴ See 1 Cor. viii. 11, &c.

Wherefore let all Christians, and more especially all the ministers of Christ, promote the will of their heavenly Father, and *despise not one of his little ones*. It was the merciful character of the Saviour of the world, that he should “gather the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead them that are with young.”

LECTURE XLV.

PROPER TREATMENT OF OFFENDERS.

MATT. xviii. 15—20.

15. *Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*

16. *But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*¹

¹ Such was the rule of the law of Moses: Deut. xix. 15. “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: *at the mouth of two or three witnesses shall the matter be established.*” See also Numb. xxxv. 30; Deut. xvii. 6.

17. *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church : but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

We have here an important passage concerning the behaviour of Christians one towards another. *If thy brother shall trespass against thee.* As was said before, this must be expected, and provided for. "It must needs be that offences come." Christians are partakers of human nature : they have fallen by Adam's transgression : they have the corrupt heart, out of which *trespasses* proceed : they are prone to self-love, the source of envy, fraud, ill-will, and slander. Even though the heart is under a course of renewal by the Spirit of Christ, yet this renewal is a gradual work, incomplete and imperfect. It may therefore happen, that brother shall trespass against brother. What is the usual practice in such cases ? The offended person whispers his complaint to his friends and neighbours, and the rent is made worse by misrepresentation and exaggeration. This had been perceived by Solomon, who directs, "Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself, and discover not thy secret to another."² And now our Lord says, *Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone* : it may be that *he hear thee* : he may see his error, he may regret it, and make reparation ; and *thou hast gained thy brother* : thou hast gained him as a friend : for if there is grace in his heart, he feels that his soul is profited, and that has endeared thee to him : and thou hast gained him as a worthy dis-

² Prov. xxv. 9.

ciple to Christ: for, “if any do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”³

Perhaps he *will not hear thee*. A man is a bad judge in his own cause, and may think himself offended, rather than an offender. Therefore *take with thee one or two more*, whose opinions and authority may confirm your own. Though the Christian will do much and suffer much, rather than “go to law with another,”⁴ still it is on every ground far more desirable that wrong should be redressed, than that it should remain unnoticed.

Thus far the rule laid down may guide at all times the private Christian’s conduct. What follows has in a great measure ceased to apply. *If he neglect to hear thee, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican*. While Christians formed a small body taken out of the rest of a city or nation, the church was a separate party, and the ministers and elders of it could, in a solemn way, admonish and correct an individual member in the name of the Lord: and if he refused to regard their censure, could exclude him from their community. So in the Corinthian church, a member of it was living with a person who had been “his father’s wife.”⁵ St. Paul directs, “concerning him who hath done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered toge-

³ James v. 20.⁴ 1 Cor. vi. 6—8.⁵ 1 Cor. v. 1—5.

ther, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." He was to be cast out of the church, *as an heathen man and a publican*: and, in this particular instance, to be given up like Job to the malice of Satan, if peradventure the "day of adversity" should lead him to "consider," and repent, and "return to the Lord."

In this way the early christian congregations were able to preserve a society far more pure and unmixed than has ever been since maintained. This has been alleged as one great cause of their increase. So it must have been. The sight of a considerable number of persons all actuated by the motives which Christians profess, and not materially deviating from the regulations of the gospel, living not for this world, but above it,—must have produced a strong effect upon the minds of those who witnessed them. Whereas among nominal Christians now, there is such a variety of conduct, such infinite degrees of obedience and disobedience, that the power of example is in a great degree lost upon the world.

We see, however, that the spirit of the precept here given will justify the withdrawing from "any brother that walketh disorderly:" and also the having recourse to law in cases which require it, as with one who has no claim as a christian brother on our forbearance.

18. *Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

19. *Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.*

20. *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

The solemn sanction here pronounced to ratify the judgment of the apostles, was suited to the same state of the church which allowed of what St. Paul directs in the case of the Corinthian offender; it was suited to that particular inspiration which enabled Peter to see into the heart of Ananias, that particular guidance which was a security against human frailty and error. As the inspiration ceased which belonged to the apostles, and as the gift of miraculous power was gradually withdrawn, so would also be withdrawn the promise here closely connected with it: *If two of you shall agree touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.*

Still there remain great truths, which will never be set aside. The ministers of Christ do not now *bind* or *loose* the souls of their people: they do not absolve or condemn on their individual authority. They dare not hazard the assumption of such a responsibility. But they still are, and will remain, the guardians of those doctrines on which eternal life and death depend. So likewise “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man,” much more of an assembly of righteous men, “availeth much:” and so likewise Christ will still by his Spirit be present with those who are *gathered together in his name*, whether in the sanctuary, for the purpose of prayer and praise, or animated by a

desire to promote his glory, by extending his kingdom more widely in the world. There may his mysterious presence be expected, to answer the prayer of earnest faith, and to favour the designs which are undertaken in dependence upon his will. He knows them that are his; and as they “hear his voice, and follow him,” so does he hear their voice, and bless them.

LECTURE XLVI.

FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES ENJOINED BY THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT.

MATT. xviii. 21—35.

21. *Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?*

22. *Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, until seventy times seven.*

Our Lord had been recommending great forbearance towards an offending brother. This was “a new commandment” to those who had been accustomed to the maxim, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy.” And its novelty leads Peter to ask how far this forbearance and forgiveness is to extend? *How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?*

This opens the way to a precept which must be written on every Christian's heart. *I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.* If he trespass against thee seven times a day, and seven times a day turn again to thee, saying, "I repent—thou shalt forgive him." He must be sooner wearied with offending, than you with pardoning. But as this commandment was new to the Jews, and will always be new to the natural heart, its reasonableness is further exhibited by a parable.

23. *Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.*

24. *And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents.*

25. *But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.*

26. *The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*

27. *Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.*

This example represents the case of all men, when their accounts with God come to be examined. Think of their youth, which is spent, too often, in disobedience to parents and disobedience to superiors; in perverseness and selfishness; in contempt of God's holy name; in vanity and falsehood. Think of their manhood, which instead of being devoted to the service, and employed in the glory of God, is too commonly given up to pleasure, or directed by ambition or sensual gratification. Or, even supposing that through divine

grace, neither youth nor manhood have been wasted in forgetting God, or disobeying him ; still, who can bear the exact scrutiny which his omniscient eye has been carrying on throughout all their lives ? “There is not a word in my tongue,” nor a thought in my heart, “but thou, O God, knowest it altogether.” Can any one reflect on this, and not feel the burthen of his debt ? He may indeed refuse to look into it, he may close his eyes against it : but this does not diminish the weight of what he owes, any more than it diminishes the debt of any inconsiderate spendthrift, that he refuses to examine the accounts of his creditor against him. There must be a day of settlement, if no means are used to cancel what is due ; there will be a time when the king will *come to take account of his servants* : and when he begins to reckon, those will be found who owe unto him ten thousand talents.

And as all are alike in this, that they cannot say they have no sin ; so all are alike in this also, that they have *nothing at all to pay*. For what can they do ? Repent of having sinned ? That they may well do : but will this make void what is past ? It does not discharge a debt, to lament that we incurred it. Or shall they sin no more ? That too must be their endeavour : but suppose they could accomplish it, does it discharge a debt now existing, that you do not make that debt larger ? Will not the debt still remain that was originally contracted ? So that, do all we can, we are like the servant in the parable, and *have nothing at all to pay*.

What then have we to allege in our own behalf,

why judgment should be stayed? that God may not deal with us after our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities? We can indeed do nothing, but *fall down and worship God*, and beseech him to *have patience with us*: we can but implore the Redeemer, that as we on our parts have nothing at all to pay, he will *pay all* for us; will discharge our debt, will let his life be our ransom. If we do this, with hearty repentance and true faith, God has abundantly testified that he will be *moved with compassion and forgive us the debt*. He will resist obstinacy; he will resist pride; he will resist the self-righteous Pharisee and the hardened sinner; but he will not resist humiliation, and penitence, and prayer: still less will he resist that Saviour who is set down at his right-hand, and has made a full, perfect, and sufficient satisfaction for the sins of all that turn to him.

Let none put off the time of looking into their accounts with God, till the king actually comes to reckon with his servants. I trust that you are not going blindly on, without reflecting upon the infinite amount of your debt; but that you have solemnly acknowledged your inability to pay, and have humbly besought your Maker to have patience with you, and your Redeemer to pay all for you. To him you must look from first to last. He alone can satisfy God's justice, and give you peace with him; and after you have lived your appointed time on earth as his ransomed and "peculiar people," he alone can present you pure and faultless before the throne of God:¹ not as you are in yourselves, full

¹ See Jude, 24.

of error and infirmity, even at the best ; but in the “ white garments of salvation,” your sins being “ washed in the blood of the Lamb.”

And now consider what may reasonably be expected of those who have been thus forgiven. You had nothing at all to pay, and your debt is blotted out. And would it not be shocking for one who pretended to have this hope in him, to entertain malice or resentment against a fellow-creature, on account of some real or supposed injury ? We are taught, by the conclusion of the parable, in what light such conduct would appear in the eyes of God.

28. *But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence : and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.*

29. *And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*

30. *And he would not : but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.*

Two things are here to be observed. First, that the fellow-servant really owed the other something: he *owed him an hundred pence*. This supposes that we may indeed receive an injury from a neighbour ; may be seriously hurt in our reputation or our fortune. It is not asserted that these things are nothing ; that we can avoid feeling them as injuries ; that we have not a right to complain of those who commit them intentionally. Neither is it asserted in the parable, that the *hundred pence* may not represent a sum of money which it is inconvenient for the creditor to lose.

But what the parable does imply—the second thing to be remarked—is, that the greatest injury which a fellow-creature can do to us, is no more in comparison with our offences against God, than a hundred pence are to ten thousand talents : which is about as four millions of our money to three pounds. And, therefore, God may justly require of us, if we hope for forgiveness from him, that we forgive our brother his trespasses.

That he does require it is plain, from the sequel.

31. *So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.*

32. *Then his lord, after he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me :*

33. *Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee ?*

34. *And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.*

35. *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

Thus it appears that a charitable, forgiving spirit in ourselves, and God's mercy towards us, are closely connected together : and that “ he shall have judgment without mercy who has shown no mercy.” Not that our forgiveness of an offender can merit or procure God's pardon : we cannot come before him as if we expected or claimed forgiveness, because we have forgiven our enemies. In the parable, the lord began by showing compassion on his debtor, and loosed him, and for-

gave him the whole. And then, when he had forgiven him, he expected to see a forgiving spirit in return. He expected that a sense of mercy received should produce in him a merciful disposition. *Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?*

The exercise of this duty is in many cases hard to flesh and blood. The spirit which practises it can only be produced by the gospel of Christ Jesus, which has this excellence among other proofs of Him from whom it came, that it creates the quality which it prescribes. Its doctrines establish its precepts. The belief of what the Scriptures affirm, that we are all sinners against God, to whom pardon is freely offered through the mercy of Christ, must inspire us, if it be sincere, with a corresponding feeling of mercy towards others. The Christian is "kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven him."

This then is the secret for increasing such a spirit in your hearts. Meditate on your own need of mercy. Think on the ten thousand talents which you owe, and you will forget the hundred pence which may be due to you. One who truly feels the weight of his own sins, finds it impossible to think severely or feel resentfully towards his neighbour. He must pardon others, when there is so much in himself to be pardoned. And if he has tasted in his own bosom the peace and comfort of his Redeemer's love, he must forgive, when he has been so much forgiven.

LECTURE XLVII.

OF MARRIAGE.—CHILDREN RECEIVED AND BLESSED.

MATT. xix. 1—15.

(Mark x. 1—16.)

1. *And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judæa beyond Jordan ;*

2. *And great multitudes followed him ; and he healed them there.*

3. *The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause ?*

4. *And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female ;*

5. *And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife : and they twain shall be one flesh ?*

6. *Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

7. *They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away ?* 2

8. *He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives : but from the beginning it was not so.*

9. *And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another,*

¹ Gen. ii. 24.

² Deut. xxiv. 1.

committeth adultery : and whoso marrieth her which is put away, doth commit adultery.

10. *His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.*

11. *But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.*

12. *For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb : and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men : and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.*

The apostles had been brought up under a corrupt discipline : for through the abuse of the limited permission granted in the law of Moses, separation of married persons, by a *writing of divorcement*, was very common among the Jews. It had been made matter of severe reproof by the prophet Malachi ; (ii. 14, &c.) “ The Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth. against whom thou hast dealt treacherously : yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the Lord the God of Israel saith, that he hateth putting away.”

The apostles, however, misled by evil custom, were ignorant of the undoubted fact, that nothing so generally contributes to domestic harmony, as the indissolubleness of the marriage tie : nothing so surely disturbs it, as the facility of separation. Hence their remark,—if this is to be the case, if “ a wife may not depart from her husband,” if one “ bound unto a wife,” may “ not seek to be

loosed,"³ *it is not good to marry*. Our Lord replies to their rash observation in the most condescending terms. Your notion cannot be generally received. Marriage is instituted of God, and is commonly desirable for mankind. There may be certain cases, in which it is expedient to wean all affections from things below : there have been some, and there may be more, who have renounced the pleasures of conjugal and parental affection, that they might devote themselves to the love and service of God. These may do well. "But as God has distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every man, so let him walk." "Every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that."⁴

13. *Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray : and the disciples rebuked them.*

14. *But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me : for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*

15. *And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.*

The mistake of the disciples here, as in the preceding instance, furnished occasion for a lesson of divine wisdom. You are forbidding *little children to come unto me*. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." They are examples of what all must be who are admitted into God's heavenly kingdom.

This is a proper subject for consideration. For, undoubtedly, there is much in children which we know to be displeasing to God. There is wilfulness. A child does not naturally submit to be re-

³ 1 Cor. vii. 3 and 10.

⁴ 1 Cor. vii. 17 and 7.

strained and contradicted. It does not yield up its own will to the will of those whom it ought to obey; but shows, by perverseness and selfishness, the corrupt stock from which it springs, the corrupt nature with which it is born. There is also in children a recklessness of everything beyond the present time, and an ignorance of things most needful to be known, which, though not to be imputed to them as a fault, because it belongs to their early years, still must not be suffered to remain; for the apostle has left it written, that we “be not children in understanding,” but “add to our faith knowledge.”

Yet we are told, *of such is the kingdom of heaven*. There are many qualities, we know, which must be found in those who enter that kingdom: some of which do naturally belong to the tender age of children, and others of which a tender age is naturally incapable. But what our Lord seems here to have had especially in view, is their freedom from gross and presumptuous sins. For such must be the heirs of the kingdom. Certainly a child has no active obedience to his Maker. But then he has no open defiance to his will. Certainly a child has the seeds of all sin within him: but those sins have not grown up, and flourished, and ripened their poisonous fruit. We behold the playful infancy of a child: we know well that in the strict sense of the word it is not innocent: but still, if we were told that God would take such a being to dwell with himself in a purer state, we should see in that nothing to contradict our ideas of God or of heaven. But when we look upon a wicked

man, in full bearing of the fruit of his natural corruption ; polluted with uncleanness, intemperance, malice, hatred, profaneness, covetousness : we perceive at once that such an one, unless he turn away from his wickedness and be converted, must needs “be punished,” as Scripture declares that he will be, “with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.” We are not surprised, when St. Paul assures us that no adulterer, nor unclean person, nor drunkard, nor malicious, nor revengeful, nor covetous man,⁵ “hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” Nay, we should be surprised if he said that they could be admitted there, unless they repent and be converted.

In this, then, the kingdom of heaven is for such as little children. Its inheritors, like them, must be free from the pollution of sin. They must be cleansed “from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit.” They must be bearing the image of God in righteousness and true holiness. The apostle says, “in malice,” though not “in understanding,” yet “in malice be ye children :” that is, be without malice, as they are. And so we might go on to say,—in all “the works of the flesh ; in adultery, fornication, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like,”—“be ye children :” be like those, the happiness of whose infancy it is that they cannot be guilty of those sins, on account of which the wrath of God cometh upon the wicked. The disposition, indeed, may be lurking within, the evil propensity may remain, as the seeds of all evil are in the hearts of children : there is “a law in

⁵ Compare Gal. v. 19—22, with Eph. v. 5, 6.

the members warring against the law of the mind :” a law which nothing but divine grace restrains from prevailing. Still, “ he that is born of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” “ He cannot sin :” he cannot yield to wilful and presumptuous sin, “ because he is born of God.” “ Sin has no more dominion over him ;” he is “ led by the Spirit, and through the Spirit does mortify the deeds of the body.”

Everything is important—so important that all other things are trifling in comparison—which assists in showing us what those must be who belong to the kingdom of heaven. Therefore let all examine themselves, and see whether they possess those qualities which Christ approves in CHILDREN. Our dependence—and we have daily reason to thank God for this—is not in our own righteousness or holiness. Still there is no proof that we are entitled to trust to the righteousness of Christ, unless we are clothed in the robe of innocency, which is a part of that wedding-garment which he bestows, and expects to find on all who are to sit down as guests at the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

LECTURE XLVIII.

CHRIST QUESTIONED BY A YOUNG RICH MAN.

MATT. xix. 16—30.

(Mark x. 17—30. Luke xviii. 18—30.)

16. *And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*

17. *And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God :¹ but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*

18. *He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,*

19. *Honour thy father and thy mother : and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

This young man had heard the report of our Lord's fame as a teacher sent from God, and seems to have come not as others, "tempting him," but, like Nicodemus, to ascertain his doctrine : to see how it differed from that of the scribes and Pharisees : and how that *eternal life* was to be attained, which Jesus was understood to make the foundation of all his precepts. *What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*

A point is gained, when men come to inquire

¹ This condemns the pompous titles which the Jews were accustomed to give to their teachers the Rabbsi, and which these expected and delighted in.

about eternal life at all. It is often heard of and talked of, without exciting any inquiry.

Jesus reminds him of the law in which the will of God was declared. (Levit. xviii. 4, 5.) “Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord.” This law he was “not come to destroy, but to fulfil:” not to make void, but to establish. It is as true under the gospel as under the law, that whosoever “will enter into life, must keep the commandments.” And Jesus saw fit to use this great truth as the basis of his teaching on the present occasion.

20. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

It may be, that in this answer, he did not mean to boast of entire obedience, but only to observe, that he had received these commandments as the law of his forefathers and his country; had been taught from his youth to keep them, to consider them as his guide and rule. If indeed he intended to assert that he had never offended against them by omission or transgression, he gave a proof how little he knew himself and his own infirmity. Had he been sincerely endeavouring to regulate his thoughts, words, and works, according to the pure and holy law of God, his answer would have been—All these I have been taught to follow: and “I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring

against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”² Who shall deliver me from the power of this corrupt nature? The gospel has its ready answer to such inquiries as these: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”³

This young man, however, complains of no difficulty, and experiences no distrust of himself: and on his question, *What lack I yet?*

1. *Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.*

You have the knowledge which must be the foundation of all religion; you have been initiated into acquaintance with God and his will: you have “the shadow of good things to come:” *if thou wilt be perfect*,⁴ wilt be completely instructed in the ways of wisdom, there is more to learn than a short discourse can tell—nay, there is much which cannot be yet fully explained:—but give up your earthly possessions, make common cause with my disciples, and *come and follow me*, that you may *have eternal life*.

² Rom. vii. 23.

³ Rom. vi. 14.

⁴ *Τελειος*, is explained by a similar usage, 1 Cor. ii. 6, and Phil. iii. 15. “We speak wisdom among them that are *perfect*.” “Let us therefore, as many as are *perfect*, be thus minded.”

These very words, *Follow me*, were addressed to Matthew, “and he arose and followed him.” Had this inquirer done the same, he like Matthew would have belonged to Christ’s earthly kingdom: unto him “it would have been given” to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: and he too like Matthew might have obtained a place in his heavenly kingdom: the sacrifice was not to be unrequited: *thou shalt have treasure in heaven.*

22. *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*

23. *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

24. *And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

25. *When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?*

26. *But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.*

How many are the temptations attached to riches, which prevent a man from “seeking first the kingdom of God!” Riches have the advantages of this world; and dispose the heart to set its affections here, instead of looking beyond, to “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled.” Riches can purchase pleasure: and he “that liveth in pleasure is dead while he liveth.” Riches lead to honours; and there is danger of “loving the praise of men more than the praise of God.” But all these natural difficulties are surmounted by the

energy of divine grace. *With God all things are possible.* And, taught of him, the rich may learn so to employ their wealth and their influence, as to “lay up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.”

27. *Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee ; what shall we have therefore ?*

28. *And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration⁵ when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

29. *And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*

30. *But many that are first shall be last ; and the last shall be first.*

The expressions here, are taken from earthly judgments and dignities. Those who, for Christ's sake and the gospel's, have forsaken what is now dear to them, shall hereafter have high honour, high dignity, in that “new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” As the promise is expressed elsewhere, “To him that overcometh, will I give to sit with me on my throne.” Then they who now despise and persecute my followers, shall see the men whom they despised and persecuted, honoured with the first place in the kingdom of God : seated by the throne of the Judge ; nay,

⁵ In the renovation or restoration of all things ; in “the new heaven and new earth” which shall be, when “the first heaven and the first earth are passed away.”— *See Rev. xxi. 1.*

sitting in judgment with him, and condemning, by the example of their own faith, those who refused to repent and believe.⁶ For many shall change places; *many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first.*

One among other lessons to be learnt from the passage before us is, to be certain that we know the purpose of our own hearts. This young man seemed to desire eternal life. But he did not desire it so far as to make a sacrifice for it. He valued his earthly possessions more. Many, in every age, are under the same delusion. They imagine that they have a sincere intention to please God, and lead a christian life, and seek everlasting happiness. They will “do many things:” things that do not interfere with their old habits, or differ from their neighbour’s practice, or injure their worldly interest, or cost them any painful sacrifice. But they *lack one thing*. They will not so surrender to their Saviour their entire heart, as to do everything, resign everything, renounce everything, rather than be without a decisive and certain proof of lively faith.

Let all consider within themselves. They value their hopes of heaven. They would not forfeit them for worlds. They desire to have eternal life.

So this young man desired. But when the trial came, it appeared that he desired still more to preserve his earthly possessions.

⁶ Such is probably the meaning of what is said in v. 28, that the apostles *shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

May God teach us all to understand ourselves ! A sincere desire of eternal life is not a mere wish to inherit it, but a determination to seek it at all hazards. A man might desire a livelihood, a fortune ; but if he took no pains to procure or earn it ; evidently he would like something else better, namely, his own ease. Now, eternal life is not to be attained, unless it is sought in the first place. It was not attained by him, who preferred his worldly possessions. It cannot be attained by any who refuse to part with every evil habit and sinful indulgence. Riches were the touchstone applied to this man's faith, and showed it to be defective. Any corrupt or even doubtful practice, anything which in the least offends against conscience or the spirit of the Bible, will equally show our profession to be insincere. It withholds our heart from Christ, as his was withheld. It proves us unworthy of eternal life, as he was proved unworthy. We can only attain that on the terms of him who offers it ; which are, that we " seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and make no attempt to " serve God and Mammon."

LECTURE XLIX.

PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

MATT. XX. 1—16.

1. *For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.*

2. *And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*¹

The way of God's dealings with man under the gospel dispensation, is here compared to the conduct of a householder who employs labourers in his vineyard. The householder has a vineyard to be cultivated: he hires labourers; he assigns them a reward. God too has a work for his reasonable creatures; that they should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world, in expectation of his glorious kingdom hereafter.² *Early in the morning*, from their very infancy, are Christians summoned to this service: summoned to renounce the works of the devil, and to keep God's holy will and commandments, and to walk in them all their life. So is it engaged in behalf of every child in baptism; and happy, happy would it be, if all, as they come to age, acknowledged the obligations by which they are bound, and kept that service which

¹ For the customary price of a day's labour in that country.

² See Titus ii. 11—14.

is “perfect freedom.” Great indeed is the honour of the service, and great “the recompense of the reward.” Why has our heavenly King so often reason to expostulate, “If I be a Father, where is mine honour? And if I be a master, where is my fear?”³

3. *And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,*

4. *And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.*

5. *Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.*

Reckoning the morning, as the Jewish custom was, from the sixth hour of our day, *the third hour* answers to the period of youth; *the sixth* to that of manhood; *the ninth* to that of advancing age. A quarter, or a half, or even three-fourths of the longest life are now past. Is it to be still said, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved?” Such is the goodness of God, that he does not abandon the rebellious people who have long preferred their own will to his. He does not let them alone, to reap the fruits which they have sown. The Gospel is continually sounding in their ears the offer of reconciliation and acceptance; is inviting them to seek the pardon of sin through the one sacrifice for sin, and so to go *into the vineyard and work* there their appointed time. Such were those whom John the Baptist brought to repentance: such were those who first listened to the message of the apostles: and such

are many in every age, who, having in their youth been deaf to the call of duty, hearken to it in their riper years. What reason have they to bless God, who has subdued their sinful and reluctant hearts, and made them willing to serve him ! How thankfully does St. Paul speak of this, and describe his own case as an encouragement to others ! “ For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.” ⁴

6. *And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle ?*

7. *They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard ; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.*

Observe what is implied in the question, *Why stand ye here all the day idle ?* Yet why should they not, if there was no certain and essential concern, in which it was their duty to be engaged ? And what that concern is, we need not go far to inquire. It is the working out our salvation ; it is the securing our eternal state ; it is the preparing ourselves for eternity, by living to him who died for us ; died for us, that he might bring us to God, and make us a peculiar people, zealous in the Lord's service, and doing all to his glory. Whosoever is not thus employed, is, in the irreversible judgment of his Maker, *idle*. Busy enough he may be, and probably is : for the yoke of Satan

is not light, nor the burden of Mammon easy : but God will esteem him idle, and appoint him the portion of the slothful and unprofitable.

It is true concerning the Gentiles, whose case was perhaps uppermost in our Lord's view when he uttered this parable, that they might with some justice return the answer, *Because no man hath hired us.* Their business in the world, though it might have been better known and practised than they did know or practise it, had not been clearly revealed. But none of us could plead a like excuse. We have been engaged, from our very birth, to the service of God through Christ Jesus. Those of us who have been standing idle, have not stood idle for want of business to perform. A business has been enjoined us which may well employ our first thoughts and our best endeavours ; a business honourable, if to serve the King of heaven is honourable ; a business great and serious, if the condition of a never-dying soul is serious. He said to us at our baptism, *Go ye into my vineyard, and whatsoever is right ye shall receive.* He repeats the same to us, by the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, every time that conscience whispers, *Is my heart right with God ?* He says the same by the voice of his word, whenever we are warned in Scripture, "What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?" His ministers are constantly pressing the same truths upon us ; and so is the flight of life, and so is the approach of death, and so is the daily disappearance of our neighbours from this earthly scene. We, therefore, if we are standing all the day idle, idle as to the most import-

ant thing, though perhaps busy in worldly affairs, and even pleading that excuse—we cannot allege the pretext that *no man hath hired us*.

8. *So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.*

9. *And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.*

10. *But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more ; and they likewise received every man a penny.*

11. *And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,*

12. *Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.*

13. *But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong : didst not thou agree with me for a penny ?*

14. *Take that thine is, and go thy way : I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.*

15. *Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own ? Is thine eye evil, because I am good ?*

16. *So the last shall be first, and the first last : for many be called, but few chosen.*

This conclusion of the parable rebukes, by anticipation, the envy and jealousy of the Jewish nation, which burst out as soon as the apostles proclaimed, that “God had granted unto the Gentiles also repentance unto life.” This “holy nation,” this “peculiar people,” murmured that others should be “made equal unto” themselves in the kingdom of God, whether on earth or in heaven. No disciple of Christ ever complained that God had shown mercy unto those whom he may have received at the

eleventh hour. No disciple of Christ ever boasted that he had *borne the burden and heat of the day*: he entreats from first to last that his offences may be pardoned, and not that his merits may be weighed. But the *eye* of the Jew was *evil*, because God *was good*: when a multitude of the Gentiles heard the word gladly, they were “filled with envy:”⁵ and even Peter himself was instructed by a vision, before he ventured to declare that “in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him.”⁶ So corrupt and deceitful is the human heart: which is capable of finding even in its spiritual privileges the materials of jealousy, contempt, and hatred.

It is not the object of this parable, to point out the danger of delay in turning to the service of God. But the parable gives occasion to remark it. For how few live to an eleventh hour! How few, if they do live to it, then listen to a command which they have rejected all their lives! Fewer still are able to give proof of their obedience, by going then to do work in the vineyard! Let not the “long-suffering of God,” which is designed to “lead to repentance,” lead to presumption which might preclude repentance. To *the eleventh hour*, to the very close of life, it is written over mercy’s gate, “Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” But upon no man’s forehead is it written, This man shall have space granted him to seek the gate at last, and shall have the will to knock there. And if God intended to reward those who do not de-

⁵ Acts xii. 45; xiv. 1, &c.

⁶ Acts x. 35.

cidedly engage in his service, we should not find this parable in scripture. He would not rebuke and invite those who are *standing all the day idle*, if all were to receive, whether they had laboured in the vineyard or no. If God would hereafter make no “difference between him that serveth him, and him that serveth him not,” we should not be told that though *many are called few are chosen.*

LECTURE L.

DISTINCTION REQUESTED FOR JAMES AND JOHN.

MATT. XX. 17—34.

(Mark x. 35—45.)

17. *And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,*

18. *Behold, we go up to Jerusalem ; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death,*

19. *And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him : and the third day he shall rise again.*

20. *Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.*

21. *And he said unto her, What wilt thou ? Shesaid unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.*

Those who are nearest in power and greatness to an earthly king, sit on his right hand and his left. The mind of the mother of these apostles had not yet been raised to things above, or taught to expect a spiritual kingdom. And we cannot wonder at the distinction which she desired for her two sons. "After all these things do the Gentiles seek." Only let not those, who profess to "seek first the kingdom of God," show the same eagerness for worldly things as if they expected no other portion.

To the demand then made upon him, our Lord replies :

22. *But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ? They say unto him, We are able.*¹

23. *And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with : but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.*

Our Lord first gave them an intimation, that the honour they sought could not be easily attained, and could only be reached by patiently enduring whatever they might be called to suffer in the cause of his religion.

¹ In early times, each guest at an entertainment, or member of a family, had a portion assigned him, a mess or a cup of his own. See Gen. xliii. 34. Hence the figurative expression—*Ye shall drink of my cup* ; ye shall taste of that dispensation which is assigned to me.

Probably the two disciples did not fully comprehend his meaning. They would perceive, however, what it implied. They must be prepared to expect dangers and endure hardships. This they had been accustomed to hear. And they answer, *We are able*. We are ready to encounter all difficulties.

Our Lord's reply indicated an exact foreknowledge of what should happen. *Ye shall indeed drink of my cup*: ye shall indeed be called, as my disciples, to taste of the same cup of suffering which I have engaged to drink: and *ye shall be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with*; ye shall be plunged in earthly sorrow of the same nature as mine: for "the disciple is not greater than his lord." A prediction which was surely fulfilled. For of these two brothers, James was the first among the apostles whom we read of as slain "for righteousness' sake;"² and John was imprisoned at a very advanced age, and, like his blessed Master, was made "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."³

This he, who knew all things, now foretold, though in dark words which could not be immediately understood. "Now I tell you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he."

What follows, takes us by surprise. *To sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father*. The matter in our Lord's mind, as

² Acts xii. 1, 2.

³ See Rev. i. 9.

he spoke, was, no doubt, his heavenly kingdom. It might not be in the apostle's mind, but it was in his mind. And how are we to explain his meaning, when he says, *It is not mine to give?* To whom then should we go? Especially when he has elsewhere asserted: "The Father judgeth no man, but hath delivered all judgment to the Son." "All things are delivered unto me of my Father." "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there ye may be also." All these sentences prove, that, in one sense, the kingdom of heaven *is* our Lord's giving, and only his giving. How then do they agree with the clause, which says, it shall only *be given to them for whom it is prepared of the Father?* A little consideration will explain.

It has pleased God in the gospel covenant, to promise eternal life to such as shall possess a certain character, or answer a certain description. He does not assign it to particular persons, but to a particular description of persons. Not to this or that individual, but to every individual in whom that character is found.

HE knows, indeed, who they are, whom he "has decreed to deliver from curse and damnation, and to bring by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour." But all that he reveals, or enables us to know of them, is their character. They "are called by his Spirit working in due season; they through grace obey the calling; they are made like the image of his Son; they walk religiously in good works: and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity."⁴ And

⁴ See Articles of Religion, xvii.

beyond these; to others than these; not of this class;—it is not in the power even of our Lord to give an entrance into his kingdom. The request was, that he should dispose of it differently: that he should assign it to persons, without respect of character. *Grant to these my two sons, that they may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.* Just as in the world situations of trust are sometimes bestowed, not because the individuals are fit for them, but because they desire them. And this unjust request draws forth the memorable reply: *It is not mine to give, but to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.*⁵ Not from want of authority in him, “who is over all, God blessed for ever:” but for want of fitness in the person. In the same sense as we say, It is impossible for God to be false to his word: in that sense it is impossible for Christ himself to give his kingdom to others than those for whom God has prepared it.

It cannot, therefore, be designed for any who do not believe in him by whom it was purchased, and through whom it is bestowed.

First, because “eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ:” “No man cometh unto the Father, but by him.”

Secondly, because these alone direct their lives, discipline their hearts, and order their conversation, according to the rules of his kingdom. They “receive him,” not only as the “author of eternal

⁵ So the sentence would be rendered more clearly, and more exactly with the original, omitting the words with which our translators have filled up the sentence: ἀλλὰ is equivalent to ἐκ μὴ, except.

salvation," but as the author of a law in which they should walk towards it. This is a very peculiar path; very unlike that which we should follow of our own accord; very unlike that in which those are travelling, who have not the kingdom of God before their eyes. He in whom they are trusting, and to whom they have surrendered themselves, gradually prepares them for the state to which they look forward: withdraws them from the works of the flesh, and brings forth in them the fruits of the Spirit.

It would be contrary to the nature of things, it would be contrary to the perfect righteousness of God, if his kingdom were granted to others. There must be some agreement between the kingdom, and the characters belonging to it. To take a sinful creature, with lusts unconquered, with temper unbroken, with pride unsubdued, with a heart never bent before God in the prostration of self-abasement, or raised towards him in the aspiration of piety and love; to place such an one in the presence of God and his angels, and bid him dwell in the realms of holiness; this would be contrary to all our reasonable notions of what is right and suitable. Our own understanding teaches us, (O may we never be condemned by the acknowledgment!) that they must be "pure in heart," who are admitted to "see God;" they must be "meek," who "inherit the land" where all is peace: they must be "merciful," who obtain mercy. They must "hunger and thirst after righteousness," who are to inhabit "a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." These are they for whom

the kingdom is prepared of the Father. And as the Father and his Christ are one, it is not Christ's to give to any *except those for whom it is prepared*. Who those are, we have seen: and happy are they who can discern that character in their own hearts and lives!

24. *And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.*

25. *But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.*

26. *But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;*

27. *And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:*

28. *Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

Thus is the whole of this instructive passage closed with a lesson of humility: a lesson which ought to be more readily received, because grounded on the example of the teacher himself, who, being great, "took on him the form of a servant," and being "rich, for our sakes became poor." By so doing, he has enforced this among other truths, that the present world is not the Christian's portion: and as it is not, his habits, his desires, his feelings, ought not to appear such as if in this world only he had hope: he must be as ready *to minister* as *to be ministered unto*: as willing to serve as to rule.

(Mark x. 46—52. Luke xviii. 35—43.)

29. *And, as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.*

30. *And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.*

31. *And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace : but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.*

32. *And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you ?*

33. *They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.*

34. *So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes : and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.*

He who had compassion on the bodily infirmities of those that called upon him, and restored their sight, will still more surely have compassion on the dark and wandering mind, that “the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward those who believe.”

LECTURE LI.

ENTRY OF CHRIST INTO JERUSALEM.—THE FIG-TREE WITHERED.

MATT. xxi. 1—22.

(Mark xi. 1—10. Luke xix. 29—40. John xii. 12—16.)

1. *And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage,¹ unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,*

¹ Bethphage, a village on the hill adjoining Jerusalem, called the mount of Olives, from the trees with which it abounded.

2. *Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her : loose them, and bring them unto me.*

3. *And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them ; and straightway he will send them.*

4. *All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,*

5. *Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.²*

6. *And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,*

7. *And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.*

8. *And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way ; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.*

9. *And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David : Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord ; Hosanna in the highest.³*

10. *And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this ?*

² Zech. ix. 9. The exact words of the prophet are, " Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem : behold, thy King cometh unto thee : he is just, and having salvation ; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." According to the usage of that time and country, there was nothing especially remarkable in the choice of *the ass* for this purpose, except as the entrance of a spiritual king was shown to differ from that of an earthly monarch, or conqueror, with his triumphal horses and chariots.

³ Taken from Psalm cxviii. " This is the day which the Lord hath made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it. *Hosanna* : that is, *Save now, I beseech thee*, O Lord : O Lord, I beseech thee, send us prosperity. *Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*"

11. *And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*

Among the things written in the prophets, and relating to “him who shall come,” were the words of Zechariah which were thus fulfilled. The accomplishment of the prophecy gave to the people a last opportunity of recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. A last opportunity; for this took place on the first day of the week of the crucifixion. The Jew who was reasonable and dispassionate, should have been led by what he saw and heard to consult his Scriptures, and compare them with the facts which were taking place before his eyes, and so learn that this was indeed “he who should redeem Israel.” But the veil of prejudice was so closely drawn, that seeing they saw not, and hearing they did not understand: and God, who does all things well, saw no reason why the “veil should be taken away.”

12. *And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves,*

13. *And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.*

There were certain offerings and sacrifices which the law required. Mary, at her purification, “offered a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons.” (Luke ii. 24.) With the purveyors of these the courts of the temple were filled.

So quick-sighted are men, to perceive an opportunity of gain.

14. *And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple ; and he healed them.*

15. *And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David ; they were sore displeased,*

16. *And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say ? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea ; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise ?*

17. *And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany ; and he lodged there.*

To the question of the priests, *Hearest thou what these say ?* our Lord answers, Yes,—I hear it : and you who undertake to teach the people, ought to hear in it the fulfilment of David's prophecy, (Ps. viii. 2,) “ Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies : that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.”

There is something emphatic in what follows ; *and he left them, and went out of the city.* He leaves hearts like these, that he may go to those more worthy of him ; to such as were to be found at Bethany, where Martha lived, who cordially welcomed him, and Mary, who “ sat at his feet and heard his word.”⁴

May we never provoke him, by obstinacy or unfruitfulness, to abandon us and abide elsewhere!

⁴ See Luke x. 38.

18. *Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.*

19. *And when he saw a fig-tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away.*

20. *And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig-tree withered away!*

21. *Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.*

22. *And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive.*

The immediate use made of this withering of the fig-tree, was to confirm the faith of the apostles, by an evident example of that power, a share of which was to be communicated to themselves. You have witnessed the power of God. Have faith in him; ask in such faith, and ye shall be enabled to exercise a like power.

But though our Lord seized the opportunity of this miracle for the confirmation of his apostles' faith, its significant nature, and the particular season when it was performed, show clearly that it conveyed a further meaning. It was intended to signify the judgment of which this and the three succeeding chapters are full, the rejection of the Jewish nation. It declares the accomplishment of Isaiah's prophecy, (v. 3—5,) "O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not

done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to : I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard : I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be trodden down." The Lord had come, "seeking fruit of the fig-tree planted in his vineyard:" it bore an outward profession ; its leaves were flourishing ; as the "Jew rested in the law, and made his boast of God." But when *he came to it, he found nothing thereon but leaves only* : a mere profession : show without fruit : pretension without performance : knowledge without practice. The time of trial had been long and patient : "what more could be done to the vineyard?" So the day of utter destruction was at hand ; *Let no fruit grow on thee, henceforward for ever.*

This was spoken of the nation at large. And the whole transaction is an illustration, evident to the eye, of our Lord's words, recorded by St. John.⁵ "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, my Father, who is the husbandman, taketh away." The Jewish people were branches under God's husbandry. They had borne no fruit of righteousness : and now they were to be taken away.

We must remember, that the dealings of God with nations, are a specimen of his dealings with individuals. God applies the culture of his word, and distils the dew of his grace upon the heart : and expects that "the earth should drink in the rain that falleth oft upon it, and bring forth herbs meet for him by whom it is dressed."⁶ "For

⁵ John xv. 2.⁶ Heb. vi. 7.

whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance : but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.”

LECTURE LII.

PARABLE OF THE REBELLIOUS HUSBANDMEN.

MATT. XX. 23—46.

(Mark xi. 27—33. Luke xx. 1—8.)

23. *And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority dost thou these things ? and who gave thee this authority ?*

24. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.*

25. *The baptism of John, whence was it ? from heaven, or of men ? and they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven ; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him ?¹*

26. *But if ye shall say, Of men ; we fear the people ; for all hold John as a prophet.*

27. *And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.*

¹ Why did ye not believe him, when he testified of me as the Christ, the Son of God ?

28. *But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard,*

29. *He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.*

30. *And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.*

31. *Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, the first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*

32. *For John came unto you in the way of righteousness,² and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.*

Those to whom our Lord was now addressing himself, professed to be *working in the vineyard* of God: they professed to be guardians of his truth, and zealous for his law. But they were not really doing his work; and were not brought, not generally brought, to a better mind, even by the preaching of John, which was intended to tear off the veil of their hypocrisy, and show them their own state.

On the other hand, of *the publicans and harlots*, of the careless and profligate, who had before lived “without God in the world,” many listened to John’s message and were converted; they *repented and went into the vineyard*: and therefore they are nearer to *the kingdom of God* than those who, “when they were nothing, thought themselves to be something:” who neither practised obe-

² In the practice of righteousness: teaching it, and doing it.

dience nor repentance. The utter rejection of such is declared in the parable which follows.

(Mark xii. 1—12. Luke. xx. 9—19.)

33. *Hear another parable : There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country :*

34. *And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.*

35. *And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.*

36. *Again, he sent other servants more than the first : and they did unto them likewise.*

This parable exactly describes the conduct of God towards the Jews, and the return of disobedience which they made. “The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts was the house of Israel.” He planted them in Canaan ; he gave them a knowledge of himself and of his will ; he made them a peculiar people, hedging them out from the heathen world ; and he looked for obedience to the laws which he had prescribed.

The *servants* whom God is described as sending from time to time, are the prophets—as Samuel, and Elijah, and Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and the rest ; to whom he gave an especial commission, that they might rebuke, and exhort, and instruct with all authority : might bring the people to repentance, and confirm them in good works. But the husbandmen of those days, who had the management of the vineyard, the priests and rulers of the nation, instead of receiving these men as the servants of God, put some to death, and shamefully entreated

others, and neglected all. Which caused our Lord to declare the anger of God against that people, saying, that “the blood of all the prophets which had been shed should be required” of them: and lamenting over Jerusalem, as the city which had “killed the prophets, and stoned them which were sent unto her.”

37. *But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.*

38. *But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.*

39. *And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.*³

40. *When the Lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?*

41. *They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which will render him the fruits in their seasons.*

42. *Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?*⁴

43. *Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*

Struck with the force of this parable, as David was with that of Nathan, but like David, not per-

³ The resemblance is exact. This is the heir; *come let us kill him.* So the Jews said to Pilate, “We have a law; and by our law he ought to die, because *he made himself the Son of God.*” So again: *they cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.* And Jesus “suffered without the gate.” See Heb. xiii. 13.

⁴ Ps. cxviii. 22.

ceiving its application to themselves, these priests and elders acknowledge, by anticipation, the justice of God, in the rejection and destruction of his rebellious people. As David said, “the man that has done this thing shall surely die;” so the priests answer, *he will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen.* What the Jew counts himself unworthy of, the Gentile shall receive.

Let us beware, both as a people and as individuals, lest we are betrayed into a like sin, and fall under a like condemnation. It may seem that we cannot offend as the Jews did, who cast out and slew the Son of God. Yes: we commit an equal sin, if we refuse to *reverence* him, to have him “to reign over us.” St. Paul expressly says of those who profess to call him Lord, and who bear the name of Christians, that when they walk unworthily of their professions, and transgress his laws, they “crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”

44. *And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

The *stone* is Christ Jesus and his Gospel: *the stone which the builders rejected.* He who falls on or against a stone, is bruised: he on whom a stone falls is crushed. To this difference the verse alludes. There are many who fall, as it were, against the stone; after the manner of those who said, “Look and see, how out of Galilee ariseth no prophet:” or, “how can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Such are they to whom the doctrines of the

gospel are “ a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even they which stumble at the word, being disobedient.” (1 Pet. ii. 8.) These close against themselves the gate of God’s mercy. But as there are different degrees of faith, and therefore different degrees of reward ; so are there different degrees of sinfulness in unbelief, and therefore different degrees of punishment. On whomsoever this corner stone *shall fall it will grind him to powder*. It will heavily fall on those who opposed to the Son of God their prejudice, and their malice, and their enmity : who perverted his words, spoke falsely of his miracles, assailed him with calumnies, and prevented others from receiving the benefits of his mercy. “ Wrath will come upon such to the uttermost.” “ It were better for that man if he had not been born.”

From all blindness, and from all hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word and commandment, good Lord, deliver us !

45. *And when the chief Priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.*

46. *But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.*

They could not do anything at all against him, “ unless it were given them from above.” And his time was not yet fully come.

LECTURE LIII.

PARABLE OF THE WEDDING GARMENT.

MATT. xxii. 1—14.

1. *And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,*

2. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,*

3. *And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding : and they would not come.*

4. *Again, he sent forth his servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner ; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready : come unto the marriage.*

5. *But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandize :*

6. *And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.*

7. *But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth : and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.*

Thus far the Jewish nation is described in the parable. For them, in the first place, the marriage feast was intended : John the Baptist, the seventy disciples, and our Lord himself, and afterwards the twelve apostles and other preachers of the gospel, *bid them to the wedding* ; invited them to enter the kingdom of God. But some *made light of it* ; and others, still worse, crucified the Son for whom the

marriage was made, and his apostles *they spitefully entreated and slew*. And now the destruction of their city was at hand, and the Gentiles were bidden to take the place of which the Jews had proved themselves unworthy.

8. *Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.*

9. *Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.*

10. *So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good : and the wedding was furnished with guests.*

The apostles complied with the command here given, when they said to the unbelieving and persecuting Jews, "Lo, we turn unto the Gentiles." And the Gentiles fulfilled their part of the parable, when they heard the word gladly, and gathered themselves to the christian church. Thus *the wedding was furnished with guests*.

The parable now turns aside from any particular allusion either to Jew or Gentile, and comes to the qualifications which must be found on all alike, who shall sit down at last in the kingdom of God. *The servants go out into the highways and gather together all as many as they find, both bad and good : and the wedding is furnished with guests*. This accurately describes the state of a country in which the gospel is received and professed as the national religion. *The wedding is furnished with guests* ; but their characters are very different ; *both bad and good* ; some have and some have not the faith to which the promises are made. And here we

cannot always discern among them. We can indeed perceive the open disobedience of too many, who walk not “after the Spirit, but after the flesh” and the world. But we fear that there are hypocrites, and we trust that there are faithful believers in Christ, who are only known to him who knows what is in man. They will be distinguished hereafter.

11. *And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment :*

12. *And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment ? And he was speechless.*

No one can read this passage without an earnest inquiry, what is *the wedding garment*? To describe it, is easy, though to acquire it, and clothe ourselves with that garment, the labour of all the head, and the resolution of all the heart, and the pains of all the life, are necessary: for it is the christian character. Yet the christian character, with all its parts, and features, and graces, may be comprised in two short words, FAITH and HOLINESS. Faith in Christ, as the author of eternal life, to those who trust in him; and holiness of conduct resulting from that faith in obedience to his commands. This is the wedding garment. This is the character which we must put on here on earth, that we may be ready and appear clothed in it when our summons comes. Not that there are two garments; or that “Christ is divided;” or that salvation is partly by faith, and partly by holiness; but the faith which God expects to see in every Christian, is that faith which leads to sanctification and works by love. On

the one hand, an idle, barren trust in Christ, as having done all for us, and, on the other hand, a self-righteous confidence in a sober, moral life, are neither of them *the wedding garment*, the robe which God has commanded us to wear. Scripture teaches us, that “we are justified freely by grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” “No man cometh unto the Father but by him.”¹ And scripture no less clearly shows, that true faith in Christ “puts off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and puts on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”² So that “not every one that saith unto him, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of his Father which is in heaven.”³

In reply, therefore, to the great question, what is the wedding garment,—holiness must be combined with faith, to weave the perfect robe. To the kingdom of God here on earth, faith is the title of admission. The sinner who repents and turns to God, has need but to plead the blood shed for the remission of sin, and is “accepted in the Beloved.” But the faith which is admitted into the kingdom of God in heaven, must have been “made perfect by works;” must have “brought forth fruit unto holiness.” No man will sit down at the heavenly feast, except as a disciple of Christ Jesus. No one will be allowed as a disciple of Christ Jesus, who has not “purified himself, even as he is pure.” To the self-righteous, and to the unrighteous, the question will equally apply, *Friend, how camest thou*

¹ Rom. iii. 24; John xiv. 6. ² Eph. iv. 22—24. ³ Matt. vii. 21.

in hither, not having a wedding garment? The one has not “washed his robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The other has forgotten that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

13. *Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

14. *For many are called, but few are chosen.*

The silence of the rejected guest is no less worthy of remark, than the rest of this important parable. It is entirely different from the conduct which we find in this world. Here, men have always something to say in their defence. The antinomian pleads, that “he that hath the Son hath life.” The self-righteous plead, that every man shall be rewarded according to his works. The poor plead their ignorance, their temptations, their evil companions, their difficult circumstances. Others plead their worldly concerns, their business, their families. And others defend themselves, on the ground of their passions and their natural corruption. In some of these ways, all extenuate their own case, and put off repentance; yet hope to be accepted at the last.

But we learn here, that no such excuse will avail before God. The man without the wedding garment had not a word to allege. *He was speechless.* The only plea which could possibly have been urged, that he could not procure the wedding garment, is precluded by the merciful freeness of the gospel offer, “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.” “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

“ Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sin, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

The royal master of the feast of ancient times was wont to prepare apparel in which he clothed his guests according to the occasion.⁴ And so Christ offers to purify as well as to pardon : whom he justifies, them he also sanctifies, and prepares for the kingdom which he has purchased for them.

Let us then endeavour to realize to our minds the time, when this, which is described in the parable, shall happen to ourselves. Distance obscures the prospect : present things interfere to hide it. Let faith remove these barriers ; for “ faith is the evidence of things not seen : ” let faith set before you the day when we shall “ all appear before the judgment seat of God : ” when “ the king shall come in to see the guests assembled, among whom we ourselves shall have a place ; and he will at once perceive who bear, and who do not bear, the wedding garment. There are none who will be admitted without it ; and there are none, who may not acquire it. *Many are called, but few chosen :* but none who are called, may not also be chosen, if they will.

Blessed are they, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find clothed in “ that righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe.” They shall sit down with him in that presence, where is “ fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.”

⁴ A custom similar to that which is practised by us at funerals.

LECTURE LIV.

TRIBUTE DUE TO GOD.—THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

MATT. xxii. 15—33.

(Mark xii. 13—27. Luke xx. 20—38.)

15. *Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.*

16. *And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.*

17. *Tell us, therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?*¹

18. *But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?*

19. *Shew me the tribute-money. And they brought unto him a penny.*

20. *And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?*

21. *They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*

22. *When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.*

As the coin of the country is always issued by those who have the government of the country, the currency of coin bearing the image and superscription of a king, is presumptive proof that such

¹ This was a disputed question among the Jews at that day. The Herodians were the party who maintained *that it was lawful*.

king has authority in the land. No answer therefore could be more complete and satisfactory. *Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's.* And the inference is exact which follows, *Render unto God the things which are God's.* If an earthly king has a claim to tribute, how much more is it due to the King of kings and Lord of lords? He has clearly written his name upon the world. If we look around us, and see what has been prepared for the use and comfort of man: how "the moon is appointed for certain seasons, and the sun knoweth his going down:" how "the foundation of the earth is so laid, that it never should move at any time;" how "the waters have their set bounds, which they shall not pass:" there is surely little need to ask, *Whose is the image and superscription?* The goodness and the power and the wisdom of God are visibly inscribed upon the whole. Yet how little have *the things which are God's* been rendered unto God! Men, "when they knew God, have glorified him not as God, neither been thankful." They "have worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator."²

If instead of looking around us, we look within us, and consider the faculties with which man is endowed: having an understanding to know the wisdom of God, and a heart to feel his goodness: capable of the highest spiritual affections, capable of acting on the noblest motives, and of looking forward to immortal glory: we may again say, *Whose is this image and superscription?* Is it not "the image of God" in which man was created?

² Rom. i. 21—25.

Render therefore to God his own: let our first honour be paid to him who has a first right to it; and let our hopes, and fears, and affections, and services, be all centered in him who is alone worthy of them.

23. *The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him,*

24. *Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.³*

25. *Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother:*

26. *Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh.*

27. *And last of all the woman died also.*

28. *Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.*

29. *Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.*

30. *For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.*

It is possible, that the case here alleged, or some thing like it, might have occurred. But more probably it was invented for the purpose of argument: and served as a plausible reason to the infidels of the time, why they should put away the subject of the resurrection from their minds. In the hands of infinite wisdom, it became an opportunity of recording a most solemn truth. *In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.*

³ Deut. xxv. 5, 6.

Unscriptural and incorrect ideas of the world to come, are not confined to these adversaries of our Lord. It is too common to speak and think of it, without any deliberate consideration of its nature. And this leads to the practical error of supposing that men may pass from this world to the next, with no more preparation for the heaven which they presume upon, than if they were leaving one earthly country for another. Whereas we are told, that in the resurrection "God shall dwell with men, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And there shall in no wise enter into his kingdom anything that defileth."⁴

Here let every one contemplate his own state; and consider, how far he is preparing for such a kingdom: for the presence, the immediate presence of Him who "cannot look upon evil," in whose eyes "even the stars are not pure." Those who belong to it, are *as the angels of God*. A daily reflection upon this great truth, should lead all to examine themselves, whether they are living as those who have so high a destination held forth to them: living, and seeking to live more and more under the influence of that Spirit which alone can renew the heart, and make it meet for a kingdom in which "dwelleth righteousness."

31. *But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying,*

32. *I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*⁴

⁴ Rev. xxi.

33. *And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.*

Our Lord here points out, how a proper attention to their own scriptures should have satisfied every Jew who professed to receive them, that there is a *resurrection of the dead*. The scriptures revealed God to them, as *the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*. Yet Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, being like other men, strangers and pilgrims upon earth, had been long ago buried in their graves. To suppose, therefore, that these, although taken from this world, and returned to dust, were really extinct and lost to existence, was to suppose that God had distinguished himself as the *God of the dead*: and those who had no consciousness of his regard, and could return him no allegiance. And the force with which his argument came home to their conscience and understanding, so unlike the subtilties to which they had probably been accustomed from their usual teachers, *astonished the multitude*, and convinced them. But we are told nothing further. We are not told that it converted them. To that something more is necessary, than an argument which cannot be gainsaid.

We need no argument to convince us of the truth which the Sadducees denied. We, from our youth up, have professed to look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Our great business is to live as those should live, who have “no continuing city” here, but are waiting for the coming of their Lord.

LECTURE LV.

THE LOVE OF GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOUR.—
JESUS MORE THAN DAVID'S SON.

MATT. xxii. 34—46.

(Mark xii. 28—34.)

34. *But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.*

35. *Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,*

36. *Master, which is the great commandment in the law ?*

37. *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

38. *This is the first and great commandment.*

The question thus replied to, was asked with no good purpose. The lawyer did not seek our Lord with a desire of instruction, but *tempting him*. Divine wisdom converts evil into good. Our Lord, in answer to this insidious question, has left a reply which is to be the rule of Christians in all ages; the rule to walk by, the rule to examine themselves by. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.* Not because the commandments of God can be separately weighed, as if one was more important than another. But because this, the love of God, is the principle of all obedience, the foundation of all duty: the regulating movement of our hearts and lives. If this is wanting, every

thing is wanting: if this is really present, every thing else will follow.

We cannot doubt, but this would be the natural feeling of the heart, if mankind had not been estranged from God by sin, and alienated from the proper object of their love. It is *the carnal mind which is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God*. What therefore is foreign from our corrupt nature, must be produced in it by the power of divine grace: and He to whom we owe a perfect and undivided love, must add this to all his other mercies, that he engrave that love on our hearts, and “write it on our minds.”

39. *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

40. *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

All the revelation of himself and of his will, which God has vouchsafed to man, is comprehended in these two rules. “For what does the Lord require of thee, O man, but to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God?” The one therefore, we are assured, is like the other. It is like it, in intrinsic excellence. Love of God, which sanctifies everything which we conceive, or say, or do, is the highest perfection of which our nature is capable. And the love of our neighbour is like unto it. Contemplate it in those who have shown it most completely: in those who have given up, for the sake of the interests of others, their own interests, their own natural desires, and comforts: compare a life of charity like this, with the self-

will, self-preference, self-indulgence, which too commonly prevails; and see how truly amiable and excellent it appears. Let us only suppose all persons as earnest to promote the happiness of others, as they are studious of their own; let us suppose them as kind, as candid, as forbearing, as forgiving towards others, as they would wish others to be towards themselves: how different a scene would the world present!

If charity is such in itself, and such in its effects, we cannot wonder that “the end of the commandment is charity.”

The love of our neighbour is also like the love of God, as proof of a character “renewed after the image of God.” “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”¹ If we love the Father, we shall love his children, the creatures of his power, and the objects of his care. “By this we know that we love God, because we love the brethren.”

We see, then, how these two commandments are the test and touchstone, to which our hearts must be brought. Take the opportunity; examine them; and see how they bear the trial. To pass by, now, the first and great commandment:—if the rule which God has laid down for us, is, that we *love our neighbour as ourselves*;—and if “the transgression of his law, is sin;”—how guilty are we in his sight: for how constantly have we transgressed! There are persons, who choose to put

out of sight the duty which they owe to God, and satisfy themselves that with respect to their neighbour they are blameless. But I fear this notion springs rather from their ignorance, than from their obedience. I fear that there is not one amongst us, in the different relations of life, as neighbour, or master, or servant, or parent, or child; or in the transactions of business, and use of property, whether much or little; not one who has done exactly as he would be done by: who has fulfilled in all points the royal law, “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

And if so, what follows? what except that which is written, “Let every mouth be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God:” for that “all have sinned and come short” of his requirements.

Indeed, indeed, it would be vain to come before God as claimants, and not as suppliants. Poor is the support which we can derive from our own works, when they are tried in the balance which God has set up. We must strive so to love God, and so to love our neighbour, as if every failure in either duty would prove the failure of all our hope. But let our hope itself be fixed upon firmer ground, than anything which we have done, or can do: and let us bless God, who offers us eternal life, not as the reward of our merits, but as purchased by the blood of Him, who “gave his life a ransom for many.”

(Mark xii. 35—37. Luke xx. 41—44.)

41. *While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,*

42. *Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, the Son of David.*

43. *He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,*

44. *The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.*

45. *If David then call him Lord, how is he his son ?*

46. *And no man was ble to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.*

These words were well suited to awaken the minds of the Jews, and to show them that more was intended in scripture than they at first perceived. They had thought of Christ, of the Messiah who was to come, as the *Son of David* : probably as one like David : victorious over his earthly enemies, and delivering their country from a foreign yoke. But David in his Psalms, writing by the Spirit of God, has this passage prophetic of the Messiah. *The Lord said unto my Lord*, i. e. God said unto my Lord, who is the Christ, *Sit thou on my right hand, until I make hinc enemies thy footstool*. David, therefore, speaks of him as a superior ; gives him a title of honour ; of divine honour ; how is he then no more than *David's son*, a child of Adam ?

This suggests a question to ourselves, *What think we of Christ?* And may this question be always answered in words like these : “ My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.”

² *In spirit*. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

LECTURE LVI.

CONDEMNATION OF THE SCRIBES AND
PHARISEES.

MATT. xxiii. 1—24.

(Mark xii. 38—40. Luke xx. 45—47.)

1. *Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,*
2. *Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat :*
3. *All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do ; but do not ye after their works : for they say, and do not.*
4. *For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders ; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.*

As the scribes and the Pharisees were the great adversaries of the gospel, it was needful for our Lord to point out their errors, and show how little weight was due to their authority. Such is the purport of the discourse contained in this chapter ; from which we learn how heavy an account is laid up against all whose situation and office make them leaders and teachers, and who betray the duty which they are bound faithfully to discharge.

Something, indeed, was committed to the scribes and Pharisees, which they could not corrupt ; they *sat in Moses' seat* : the words of his law, which was the law of God, were read in the synagogue every

sabbath day:¹ these were not changed by the mouth which uttered them; and these, therefore, the people were to *observe and do*. And this is the great blessing of a revealed word; and of a public worship, in which the revealed word makes a chief part. The people are enabled to “prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.”

Still, where the accredited teacher is unfaithful, the path of duty here commanded is very difficult: observe their words, *but do not ye after their works*. Those who *say, and do not*, who act contrary to their teaching, fearfully endanger the souls of others. When it is as St. Paul states—“Thou which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law, dishonourest thou God?” when things are thus, it can hardly happen but that “the name of God should be blasphemed” through the transgression of those who ought to glorify Him, and shine as lights in the world.

5. *But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,*

¹ See Acts xv. 21. “Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogue every sabbath day.”

² *Phylacteries* were sentences of Scripture, which the Jews bound upon their foreheads and their sleeves, making a literal interpretation of Exodus xiii. 9. It shall be to thee for a sign upon thy hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes.” They

6. *And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,*

7. *And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.*

8. *But be not ye called Rabbi : for one is your Master, even Christ ; and all ye are brethren.*

9. *And call no man your father upon the earth : for one is your Father which is in heaven.*

10. *Neither be ye called masters : for one is your Master, even Christ.*

11. *But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.*

12. *And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased ; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

What is here objected against the Pharisees, shows where the principle of their corruption lay. *They did their works to be seen of men.* Whereas “it is a very small thing to be judged of man, or of man’s judgment.” Our business is, to approve ourselves to God. They make a show of sanctity, without real holiness: pretending to honour God’s word while they transgressed it. Our business is, to write the commandments “upon the table of the heart.” They desired superiority and pre-eminence: *the uppermost seats, and greetings* of respect. Christians are taught to cherish very different feelings, “in honour preferring one another.” *He that is greatest amongst them,* will be the humblest. So he will be most like his divine Master, who, for his sake,

had also been commanded to make a “fringe in the borders of their garments,” that they might “look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them.” Numb. xv. 59. Those who pretended to superior sanctity, made these fringes and phylacteries of unusual breadth.

“humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

The recollection of the great rule, *One is your Master, even Christ*, will keep all in the right place. Ministers will not seek the honour which cometh from men. Neither will the people be so blindly led by their authority, as to follow their errors, if in anything they depart from the simplicity of Scripture. They will “honour all men :” and especially him who is the minister of God to them for good : but let them still remember, *one is their Father, which is in heaven.*

13. *But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.*

The Pharisees had employed all their influence to dissuade the minds of the people from receiving Christ as the Messiah. He was of Nazareth : and they alleged that out of Nazareth cometh no prophet. He healed their sick : they murmured, because he healed them on the sabbath-day. He went into their companies, that he might teach and warn : they complained, “this man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.” He wrought many miracles : they affirmed that he wrought them through the power of the evil spirit. Thus they refused the truth which might have made them free, and leagued with Satan to keep their countrymen his slaves.

Ye neither enter in yourselves, nor suffer them that are entering to go in ! This heavy condemna-

tion falls on all, who in any way impede the progress of pure and undefiled religion : who, by word or deed, by insinuation or example, turn men aside from “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.”

14. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer : therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.*

15. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*

Their religion was a *pretence* ; they “loved to pray standing in the corners of the streets and in the synagogues, that they might be seen of men.” They *devoured widows' houses*, making “a gain of godliness.” They were indefatigable in seeking *proselytes* ; but they did not bring them over to God, but to themselves. God was in their mouths, but the world had possession of their hearts : and these things are recorded against them for our warning. Prayer may be a profession ; godliness a livelihood ; and proselytism a zeal for party, and not for God.

16. *Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing ; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor !*

17. *Ye fools and blind : for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold ?*

18. *And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing ; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.*³

³ That is, he is bound by his oath. So that the gift offered to

19. *Ye fools and blind : for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift ?*

20. *Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.*

21. *And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.*

22. *And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.*

23. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith : these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

24. *Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.*

A proverbial phrase, against those who are ostentatiously scrupulous in trifles, where there is no temptation to offend : and omit the weightier matters of the law, which require pains and self-denial. How true was this of the Pharisee, who prided himself that he paid the full demand of the treasury, even to his garden herbs, and did not perceive that he had neither humility nor charity ! How true of those who would not “eat with unwashed hands,” whilst they were daily seeking opportunities to betray the innocent ! How true of those, who “would not go into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled,” whilst they were compassing the death of Christ by subornation and perjury !

the treasury of the temple, was more sacred than the temple itself. This is a specimen of the casuistry by which the Pharisees beguiled those whom they pretended to instruct. How easily is the human heart deceived, when a sinful practice is to be defended, or a desirable good obtained !

How true of those who would pay the thirty pieces of silver, to obtain their guilty end, yet would not put it into the treasury, because it was the price of blood !

We learn from hence, to distrust ourselves, and to seek the guidance of the Spirit of God. The understanding may be perverted, because it is the understanding of a corrupted nature. The conscience may fail to awaken, because it is the conscience of fallen man. The Holy Spirit alone can enable us to perceive and to observe the *weightier matters of the law : judgment, mercy, and faith*. He has also another office ; to show how far we have fallen short of these, and can neither trust to ourselves that we are righteous nor despise others.

LECTURE LVII.

CONDEMNATION OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES.—SENTENCE OF THE JEWISH NATION.

MATT. xxiii. 25—39.

25. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.*

26. *Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

27. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear*

beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28. *Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*¹

Whatever we read of these scribes and Pharisees in the gospels, shows that what they put for religion was outward form, not inward piety or purity. The single instance is sufficient, which we find in John xviii. 28, where it appears, that those who were contriving the death of Jesus, by the most unjust means, "went not themselves into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled: but that they might eat the passover." As the heart is too naturally inclined to satisfy itself with the form of godliness, those who encourage this error, instead of opposing it, are indeed *blind guides*, most dangerous to follow.

29. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,*

30. *And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.*

31. *Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.*

32. *Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.*

33. *Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell ?*

Ye bear testimony against yourselves: because your conduct is the same. They persecuted the prophets, ye persecute me. They killed the messengers, and ye are preparing to kill the Son; "the heir." Therefore ye are true children of such fa-

¹ See Mark vii. 3, 4.

thers. Ye are *filling up the measure* of their iniquity.

34. *Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes : and some of them ye shall kill and crucify ; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city.*

35. *That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.²*

36. *Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.*

37. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not !*

38. *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*

39. *For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord ;*

Here an awful sentence is pronounced upon the Jewish nation. Their evil deeds are summed up, and the inevitable consequence declared ; with this aggravation, that they had brought all upon them-

² See Chron. xxiv. 20, 21. “ The Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper ? Because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones, at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the Lord.”

We observe, that Zechariah is there called the son of *Jehoiada*, here of *Barachias*. Many of the Jews had two names : as among the apostles, Matthew is once called Levi ; Bartholomew, Nathaniel ; and Jude, Thaddæus.

selves. How often had God called them to repentance, and they would not! By the *prophets*, whose blood they had shed; and now by his Son, and the apostles—the *wise men and scribes*—whom he was about to send ~~¶~~ forth with^α fresh message of mercy, but whom they should crucify, and scourge, and persecute!

It is with nations as with individuals, and with individuals as with nations. God willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live. He “would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;” and for this purpose he calls them to repentance, he calls them to knowledge. He sets before them such motives as are suited to their nature; motives addressed to their conscience and their reason; he “draws them with the cords of a man, with bands of love.”³

For this purpose he sends them his word; the Scriptures of truth, teaching them the way in which they should live, “righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world;” and teaching them how they may be enabled so to live, and to overcome the enemies of their salvation. And even if they have gone astray from the paths of righteousness, and wandered from their Father’s fold, he invites them back to it again, saying, “Return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you.” “Why will ye die, O house of Israel!”

Such were the dealings of God towards the Jewish nation, and such are his dealings towards ourselves. *How often would he gather his children*

³ Hosea xi. 4.

together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings !

But as men are too apt to be deaf to the voice of God, whilst it is the “still small voice” of instruction and love ; he sometimes speaks more loudly, and addresses them in the language of judgment. The Jews had, from time to time, been visited with sickness, or with the sword, and with captivity. So God visits the careless and the rebellious with sickness, or with sorrow : and thus warns them to consider their ways, while there is yet time. He reminds the sinner,—That sickness which you now feel, may not be unto death : but there must be a sickness unto death ; a last, a fatal sickness ; and how art thou prepared to meet thy God ? He reminds the mourner,—You have followed your friend to the grave, “the house appointed for all living :” so your friends must, some time or other, follow you. Therefore see that you are at peace with Him, before whom you must appear, and to whom you must give account. See that you are reconciled, are justified, are sanctified, through Him whose “blood cleanseth from all sin.”

Thus does God call his children to take refuge from the storm, before it shakes the earth. And he sent his prophets to the Jews ; and he commissions his ministers to us, to declare and enforce his word and his warnings. And he has prepared something within us, which tells us, that we ought to listen to his call. Conscience tells us, that we ought to be softened by his mercies, and awakened by his judgments. Conscience tells us, that such has been the purpose of his messages, however they have come.

And this conscience is more especially the voice of God, because it is his Spirit stirring within us. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh," and is contrary to the law of God. Our evil nature is indisposed towards the way in which "we ought to walk and to please God." But "that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit;" is given to purify and renew that evil disposition, and to make us delight in what we would naturally reject, and to follow that which we would naturally refuse. And whenever that Spirit, working with man's reason or conscience, has witnessed to the sinful and impenitent, that the road which they are so boldly walking is the broad road which leadeth to destruction; that witness is the call of God, testifying that he *would gather his children together*, and that if they perish, it is because they *will not come*.

This does not contradict the truth, that man cannot change his own will; renew his own heart. "The grace of God must prevent us, that we may have a good will, and work with us when we have that good will."⁴ "No man can come unto me," says our Lord, "except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him."⁵ He is drawing us, however, by means of which every heart is inwardly conscious, whether it yields to them or no. Those who have not been gathered under their Saviour's wings, are well aware that the fault lies with themselves and their own perverseness. We see plainly, in the gospel history, how the Jews resisted warnings, and shut their eyes against evidence. And when the secrets of all hearts are laid open; when the ways

⁴ Art. x.⁵ John vi. 44.

of God, and the ways of man are alike spread clearly before the world assembled to judgment, then will be seen the sincerity of God's offered mercy: *how often would he have gathered his children together!* And then the obstinacy of all who refused to hear will be charged upon them by their own consciences; and they will feel that they are lost, because *they would not*.

“Righteous art thou, O Lord, and true is thy judgment. The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: O grant us understanding, and we shall live!”⁶

LECTURE LVIII.

DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE, AND PERSECUTION OF THE APOSTLES FORETOLD.

MATT. xxiv. 1—14.

(Mark xiii. 1—10. Luke xxi. 5—19.)

1. *And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.*

2. *And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

In the progress of the history, we are now approaching the consummation of that purpose, for

⁶ Ps. cxix. 137, 144.

which the Son of man “was made flesh, and dwelt among men.” This was present to the mind of our Lord, less as it concerned himself than others. He had entered Jerusalem for the last time. But what were the feelings which he entertained? The same which he again expressed at a still more trying season, saying, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” As he approached the city, he had “wept over it,” on account of “the days that were coming upon it,” because it had not “known the things which belonged unto its peace.”¹ And now the sight of *the buildings of the temple*, so admired by the disciples, immediately recalls to his mind the catastrophe awaiting it in the determinate counsels of God. *Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

Forty years after these words were spoken, a stranger visiting the spot on which Jerusalem was now standing, would have been unable to discover the site of the temple which “was adorned with goodly stones and gifts,” and had been “forty and six years in building.” The foundation was dug up, and the surface ploughed. Because it “knew not the time of its visitation.”

3. *And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*

4. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.*

¹ Luke xix. 41, &c.

5. *For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ ; and shall deceive many.*

6. *And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars : see that ye be not troubled : for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.*

7. *For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom : and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places.*

8. *All these are the beginning of sorrows.*

In answer to the question, *Tell us when shall these things be?* our Lord reveals many events relating to the country, and many relating to the apostles themselves. There should be an interval ; a dangerous and fearful interval ; and many presages of the gathering storm. All those things should happen which most disturb public peace and private comfort. Many should assume the character of the deliverer, the appointed Messiah, and should *deceive many*. There shall be *wars and rumours of wars*. And these evils, arising out of men's lusts, should be attended with other evils arising out of God's anger : *famines and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places*. But all these are but *the beginning of sorrows*.²

From these short hints respecting the country at large, our Lord proceeds to what concerned the apostles themselves.

² It has pleased God, for the confirmation of our faith, that the history of the destruction of Jerusalem should be related not by a Christian, but a Jewish author, Josephus, who was himself concerned in all the affairs of that awful period. And he fully acquaints us how all these things happened as they are here foretold.

9. *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you : and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.*

10. *And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.*

11. *And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.*

12. *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

13. *But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

14. *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations ; and then shall the end come.*

To explain these prophecies, we need go no further than Scripture itself. The Acts of the Apostles illustrate them ; showing how they were delivered up to be afflicted, and were beaten in the synagogues, and were brought before rulers and kings, and were put to death for the name of Christ. St. Paul's own history may be taken as a specimen of the whole. "Of the Jews" (he says) "five times received I forty stripes save one ; thrice was I beaten with rods ; once was I stoned ; in prisons frequent ; in deaths oft ; in perils by mine own countrymen ; in perils by the heathen ; in perils among false brethren." Carried as a prisoner to Rome, he was brought before Cæsar : and in the end, he suffered a martyr's death.

The disciples were also warned, that they should *be hated of all nations for Christ's name's sake*. They opposed the vanities of the heathen, and all false pretences to religion : they explained the nature of sin : they enforced righteousness. For

this reason, they were hated of all whom they failed to convince; and who “loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

It is also foretold, that *many false prophets should arise, and should deceive many*. All the apostles, in their letters, make mention of such, who had, in their time, actually caused the mischief which these words predict, “Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” “Many false prophets are gone out into the world.” “There are certain men crept in unawares, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” These are they “that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.” “Hymeneus and Philetus, concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.”³

Such were to be the trials of the infant church, before *the end came*; before the event took place, which would prove the truth of Christ’s words, and signally confound the most determined enemies of his faith.

But even in the midst of these difficulties, persecutions, and discouragements, “the word of God grew mightily and prevailed.” *The gospel of the kingdom was preached in all the world*. “The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord, and against his

³ 2 John 7; Jude 4; 2 Pet. ii. 10; 2 Tim. ii. 17.

anointed." But the Spirit of God was stronger than the opposition of Satan; and "added to the church daily such as should be saved."

This is a part of that "sure word of prophecy," which is left for the instruction and encouragement of those, "on whom the ends of the world are come." May all contribute to the effect for which it is designed: and help to "direct our hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ;" till the fulness of time arrives, and he appears, not in *wars and rumours of wars, not in famines and pestilences*, but "with ten thousand of his saints," and "all the holy angels with him," "on the throne of his glory."

LECTURE LIX.

THE CALAMITIES ATTENDING THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM FORETOLD.—MEANS OF ESCAPE.

MATT. xxiv. 15—28.

We broke off in the midst of the discourse, in which our Lord was conveying information and warning to his disciples, as to the events which should precede the destruction of Jerusalem. He had hitherto spoken generally, and taught them to

expect troubles and persecutions. He now acquaints them more particularly how they might avoid the dreadful evils of the siege.

15. *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand :)*

16. *Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains :*

17. *Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house :*

18. *Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.*

19. *And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days !*

20. *But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day :*

21. *For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

22. *And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved : but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*

Daniel had spoken of the time, when “ the daily sacrifice ” offered at Jerusalem “ should be taken away,” and “ the abomination that maketh desolate, set up.”¹ Our Lord teaches us what is meant by “ the abomination that maketh desolate : ” saying, in St. Luke, (xxi. 20,) “ when ye see Jerusalem compassed about with armies, then know and understand that her desolation draweth nigh.”

A foreign army was every way an *abomination* to the Jews, and too surely it proved an abomina-

¹ Dan. xii. 11.

tion of desolation. When, therefore, the Romans were seen compassing about Jerusalem, the Christians who believed their Lord's words had notice to escape. Let them beware of being enclosed within the walls: when the siege has once begun, all who are in the city must abide their fate: let those who are abroad not venture to return home: and let those who are at home, flee to the mountains for safety.² Sad indeed would it be for such as could not fly, or who were forced to fly in the most distressing circumstances: with their infants, or *in the winter*, or *on the sabbath day*.³ *For there shall be great tribulation.* So grievous were the miseries attending the siege and the destruction of this city, that the historian, who was an eyewitness, declares that no city ever suffered such things; and that all the calamities which have ever happened to any, seem not comparable to those which befel the Jews. It would appear as if *no flesh could be saved*.

² Historians relate, that in conformity with these instructions, when the Roman army approached Jerusalem, the Christians who were in the city fled to Pella, a mountainous region, and to other places beyond the river Jordan.

³ The strict observance of the Jewish sabbath would forbid even flight from danger *on the sabbath day*. The enemies of the Jews sometimes took advantage of this religious scruple. Christians were not bound to the same rigid observance: but early prepossessions had such hold upon the minds of the Jews, even after they were converted to the Christian faith, that they would not use their liberty. St. Paul alludes to this, Romans xiv. 5, 6.

Perhaps, however, these are general expressions, intended to heighten the idea of distress.

Still it was not the design of God that this his people should be utterly destroyed. Therefore, *for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened, and a remnant be allowed to survive.*⁴

23. *Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.*

24. *For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

25. *Behold, I have told you before.*

26. *Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.*

27. *For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

28. *For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.*

The disciples are here assured that, if they attend to these warnings, they cannot be taken by surprise. *Behold, I have told you before.* Even though the coming of the Son of man should be sudden as lightning, it should be also visible as

⁴ This is commonly interpreted of *the Christians*. But the Christians had notice to escape, and, as far as we know, did not suffer in the siege. The Jewish people were also the "elect of God:" and God had still a purpose respecting them. St. Paul, ten years before this event, had spoken "of a remnant according to the election of grace," who had obtained "righteousness through faith in Christ Jesus." (Rom. xi. 5, 25—28.) And now, though "blindness in part had happened unto Israel," still they were "beloved for their fathers' sakes:" and out of the general calamity a portion of the people was preserved, which should hand down the race of Abraham.

lightning : and if they made a timely escape from Jerusalem, they should avoid its miseries ; if they left *the carcase*, they should escape the *eagles*.⁵

But that such a season would be a season of great trial and temptation, who could doubt ? Therefore, Satan would take advantage of it, to *deceive, if possible, the very elect*. If it were *possible* : that is, if the power of Christ were not greater than the power of Satan, and if the care of God did not preserve unto the end all those who commit their souls to him.

How great must have been the comfort of Christians of those times, when looking forward to the predicted calamities, they could also look forward to a promise which implied, “as thy day is, so shall thy strength be.” “I will pray that thy faith fail not.” Even in the midst of a most overwhelming calamity and signal judgment, God distinguishes and remembers his own, who put their trust in him. When Lot was delivered from the destruction of Sodom, the angel said unto him, “Haste thee, escape to Zoar ; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither.”⁶ There must be a difference maintained “between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.” And the expressions in this passage suggest a like consolatory reflection. *If it were possible, they should deceive the very elect. For the elect’s sake, those days shall be shortened.*

The ways of God are uniform. And when we think of the dangers of a deceitful world, and a still

⁵ Eagles formed the ensigns of the Roman army.

⁶ Gen. xix. 22.

more deceitful heart, how great is the blessing to believe that it is not possible for the snares of the world, or the enmity of Satan, to ruin those who have set their faith upon the rock of Christ! St. Paul asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Shall that to which Christians were exposed during the siege of Jerusalem, "shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"⁷ And if these could not separate Christians from attachment to their Saviour, much less could they separate their Saviour's love from them. Such trials would rather incline him still more to favour them; to give them inward support in proportion to their outward difficulties, and enable them to *endure unto the end*, that so enduring, they might *be saved*. "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night to him, though he bear long with them?" For even the hairs of their head are all numbered." The promise can never fail, "Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him."

⁷ Rom. viii. 35.

LECTURE LX.

SUDDENNESS OF THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM, AND OF THE END OF THE WORLD.
—A STATE OF PREPARATION.

MATT. xxiv. 29—51.

29. *Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken :*

30. *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven : and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

31. *And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.¹*

32. *Now learn a parable of the fig-tree ; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh :*

33. *So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.*

34. *Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.²*

35. *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*

¹ He shall send his messengers, his ministers, to every quarter of the world ; they shall sound the glad tidings of the gospel, and gather together in one fold, under one shepherd, “ such as shall be saved.”

² They took place within forty years.

The preceding verses had described the tribulation which should attend the siege of Jerusalem. The utter destruction of the city follows. This is represented in terms, which, at first sight, might seem to belong to the dissolution of the world itself. But we find that it had been customary with the sacred writers to predict the like calamities, by the use of like expressions. Such are those words of Ezekiel, (xxxii. 7, 8,) foretelling the desolation of Egypt. “And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God.” Joel also writes, in reference to the event now approaching, (Joel ii. 30, 31,) “I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come.”³

Still there would be many circumstances in common, between the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, which render the like description applicable to both. Especially its suddenness: the unprepared state in which the great mass of the people should be found. Its certainty must be taken on trust: the exact period would never be revealed.

36. *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*

³ See also Jerem. iv. 23; Amos v. 20; Zeph. i. 14.

37. *But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

38. *For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,*

39. *And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

40. *Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*

41. *Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*

42. *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

Those who pay no heed to Revelation, are, of course, occupied in earthly things, and will be so to the end. But even in those who believe, there is a perpetual conflict to be maintained between the passing concerns of time, and the more important but unseen interests of eternity. Men must *be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage*: some must be employed in the field, and others in domestic services. These are not sins, but duties—but these duties become sins, these lawful things unlawful, by the degree in which they engross the mind; the seed of life is choked with the cares and the pleasures of the world, and “brings no fruit to perfection.” St. Paul has given the rule; “Brethren, the time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world,

as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."

Our Lord continues to enforce this in words which are meant to carry on our thoughts from his first coming, when Jerusalem should fall, to his second coming, when heaven and earth shall pass away, and make room for "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

43. *But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.*

44. *Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

45. *Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?*

46. *Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*

47. *Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.*

48. *But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming;*

49. *And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;*

50. *The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,*

51. *And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

The resemblance in many points, between an overthrow such as that of Jerusalem, and the end of the world, leads to a transition in our Lord's discourse from one event to the other. Of either *day*

and hour knoweth no man. In both cases, multitudes would know not, *till the flood came and swept them all away.* In both cases there is but one and the same mean of safety, to *watch and be ready.*

It has pleased God to try the faith of his people, by requiring them to be always ready. Their death is, to them, the end of this world ; it is their summons from the Son of man, and cometh *in such an hour as they think not.* Therefore like the master who goes into a far country, and leaves his servants in charge, he tells them to watch, that the lord may not come and find them unprepared. This is all that justice requires: account must be rendered—the time alone is uncertain. The master is not obliged to acquaint his steward on what day the account is to be taken ; he warns him, that he hold himself ready. And to him who is ready, it little matters whether his lord's summons be sudden, or be long delayed. *Blessed is that servant whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing,* as was his duty in the post assigned him.

It may seem indeed desirable, even for the best and most watchful Christian, to have some time for reflection, some season for renewing repentance and confirming faith, before he goes hence and is no more seen.⁴ But in real fact, it is an advantage which belongs to very few. Such is the nature of those maladies which separate the soul from the body, sometimes lulling the senses asleep, sometimes racking the whole frame with pain, and often leaving a very short interval between the first

⁴ Hence the prayer in our Liturgy, to be delivered from *sudden death.*

seizure and dissolution,—that, to reckon on the season of illness as the season of preparation for death, would be no wiser than to put off the preparing money to answer a debt, till we were summoned to pay it. And this is the exact meaning of our Lord's warning. Wherever he speaks on the subject, he always takes it for granted that there will be no time at last to make a change in a man's condition. *Know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.*

One, however, who is ready against the summons, cannot be taken by surprise, however unexpectedly he may be called. The sentinel, who is awake and under arms at his post, is not taken by surprise, though the enemy come in the dead of the night, and in the most unexpected manner. The servant who, during his lord's absence, rules the household as if his lord were at home, is not taken by surprise though the lord may come in a day when he looketh not for him. Neither is the faithful Christian taken by surprise, though the day of the Lord come to him "as a thief in the night." Like the faithful sentinel, he is found watching. Like the trusty servant, he is about his lord's business; and whenever the Lord shall say, "Give an account of thy stewardship," he is ready. For having believed that he had an account to give, he has prepared to meet it. He has secured an interest in the Redeemer's sacrifice; and he has not abused his lord's trust, or lived unworthily of the service which he had entered. He has not *begun to smite*

his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken. He has denied worldly lusts, and renounced covetousness. He will be found having “the righteousness which is through the faith of Christ.” He will be admitted “into the joy of his Lord.”

LECTURE LXI.

PARABLE OF THE FOOLISH AND THE WISE VIRGINS.

MATT. XXV. 1—13.

1. *Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.*

2. *And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.*

3. *They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them :*

4. *But the wise took oil in, their vessels with their lamps.*

According to the Jewish custom, those who were invited to a marriage, were in waiting to meet the bridegroom when he arrived home : and on his arrival they lit up lamps in token of joy and congratulation.

Why is the kingdom of heaven likened to persons engaged in this manner ?

Because Christians are invited to a banquet, a feast of heavenly things ; to a place in the kingdom of God ; at whose right hand is the fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore. That kingdom is often in Scripture compared to a feast : and Christ, the head of the feast, who provides and bestows it, is for that reason styled the bridegroom. And as the party of virgins in the parable had this business assigned them, to wait for the bridegroom and be ready when he came ; so it is the business of Christians to wait and watch for the coming of their Lord : to be prepared for the hour when he shall summon them out of this world, and bid them appear before him.

Those virgins, however, who all went forth for the same purpose, to meet the bridegroom, were not all alike in character. *Five of them were wise, and five foolish.* This was manifested by their conduct. *The foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them : but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps,* that they might have them lighted and in readiness whenever the bridegroom appeared.

This is the important part of the parable. *The foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them.* Now oil, which feeds the lamp, was the very thing they wanted ; without which they could not be ready to meet the bridegroom : could not show their respect for him, could not do honour to him, could not give any proof that they belonged to his party, and were invited to attend his marriage and partake of his entertainment.

Therefore, these foolish virgins represent all those, who, in a country like ours, though they profess and call themselves Christians, make no real, or no sufficient preparation against the great day when the Son of man shall require them to give an account of their lives. Many still remain, whom the parable does not include; many, who though Christians, because they live in Christendom, or have been baptized in the name of Christ, can in no sense be said to *go forth to meet the bridegroom*: they think nothing of him, or of his coming. Those, however, here intended, do make profession of religion; they attend its ordinances; they acknowledge an expectation of judgment, and of the world to come: and it would be a grievous offence, if any one questioned their sincerity now, or their safety hereafter. But they *take no oil in their vessels with their lamps*. They have the outward profession without the inward principles. They do not cherish those dispositions, they do not follow that course of conduct which must distinguish all whom Christ will receive as his own, and allow to enter with him into his kingdom. They do not seek this character, they do not cultivate it: they neglect and despise it. Instead of desiring and asking "the inward renewal of their souls day by day" through the power of the Holy Spirit, they resist his grace by sin, or quench it by carelessness. Perhaps they argue that their lamps need no oil: their hearts are pure, and burn brightly of themselves: they "have need of nothing." Or their lamps were lighted at their bap-

tism in the morning of their lives: they have not extinguished them by apostasy, or any heinous wickedness: what more can they require?

Yes—more, much more is required: or we shall be among those who have the “form,” but not the “power of godliness,” who “have a name to live, and are dead.” The lamp must be supplied with the Spirit of Christ: for it is written, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” The heart and the practice must be kept pure; for “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” There must be a sincere and ardent love of our fellow-creatures: this is the proof that men are disciples of Christ. The same mind must be created in us, as was in Christ Jesus: the same self-denying spirit, the same lowliness and meekness, the same patience and long-suffering.

Those who are satisfied with the name and outward signs of Christianity, and go through life without striving to add all these qualities to their profession of faith, are like the foolish virgins, who *went out to meet the bridegroom, and took no oil with them*: they will have nothing to show as proofs of faith when the bridegroom comes.

Less need be said of the wise virgins: they did what the others did not. They *took oil in their vessels with their lamps*. They prepared against the day, “when the Son of man shall come in his glory.” Through the power of the Holy Spirit, these contend against their corrupt nature, keep down the risings of sin, and encourage in their hearts whatsoever things are honourable, and lovely, and pure, and pleasing to God. They do

not flatter themselves that all must needs be well, because by their country and by their baptism they belong to the christian family; but they see that the gate of life is narrow, the way of destruction broad; and so take heed to "make their calling sure," and "give all diligence, to add to their faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity." In this way they keep themselves in a prepared state. Like the virgins who had oil ready to light up their lamps, these are careful to maintain their souls in right order, and able to meet the bridegroom whenever he appears,

5. *While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*

There is an interval during which they remain in the world, till the appointed season of their death arrives.¹ The *foolish virgins* pass this interval in ignorant carelessness. They suffer nothing to disturb them; they reject all such books and all such companions as might be likely to rouse them from their slumber; they exclude the thoughts of death; or if the memory of it is forced upon them, they speak "peace to their souls, when there is no peace." On the other hand, the sleep of *the wise*

¹ "To take *sleep* here in a bad sense, is foreign from the intention of the parable. I interpret it of *the worldly business*, in which the faithful must be occupied whilst they remain in the flesh. And though forgetfulness of the heavenly kingdom never ought to creep on them, the distractions of this world are not unfitly compared to sleep."— *Calvin in loco*.

is the calm tranquillity, not of those who are ignorant or careless of danger, but who are prepared for it. In their practice, they “watch and pray that they enter not into temptation;” but in their hearts they enjoy repose, and are entitled to it; for “being justified by faith, they have peace with God,” and are safe from the powers of darkness, whether they wake or sleep, whether they sleep or die.

6. *And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.*

7. *Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.*

The bridegroom cometh when death comes. This is the time for which they were to be ready. Then it was to be seen whether they were in a state of preparation; able to meet the eye and answer the expectations of their Lord, who looked to find them in order for his reception.

And now appears the difference between the foolish and the wise. Those who have “kept the faith” of the Son of God, meet the approach of death without dismay; it does not take them by surprise; they have provided for it; they have lived for it. Certainly it is to them, as it is to all, a serious and perhaps an awful change; but they *arise and trim their lamps*; they examine their hearts, and find them relying for acceptance solely on their Saviour’s merits; their conscience testifies that they have proved that faith by “confessing”² him in their life and practice; and these witnesses of the Spirit enable them to say, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.”

² Matt. x. 32.

As for the ungodly, it is not so with them. They are in utter confusion.

8. *And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil ; for our lamps are gone out.*

We often see this when the hour of danger and of death arrives, in those who have been content with the name of Christians without the spirit, or who have borne the outward appearance of religion, having none of its reality in their heart. At last they perceive the vanity of their hopes, the error of their past lives. And to whom do they apply in this terror and alarm? Not to the careless; not to the worldly; not to the hypocritical of their acquaintance, their former companions: but to those whom lately they despised, perhaps, as too precise or too superstitious, too careful not to miss the narrow gate that leadeth unto life, but whom they now discover to be the only wise. These they anxiously consult, and inquire, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" *Give us of your faith, for our lamps are gone out.* We are now aware that we have had no true religion; we have nothing to show; no proof of our profession; we are utterly unprepared to meet the Lord.

9. *But the wise answered, saying, Not so ; lest there be not enough for us and you ; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.*

Such is the only advice by which the minister or the pious friend is able to comfort the dying man. My faith, he says, I cannot give you; that grace which alone can make it effectual to renew your heart, is not mine to give. But go you rather to

Him, who gave himself for you as well as for me, who gave himself a ransom for all who turn to him in faith. *Go and buy for yourself*: procure by your repentance, your prayers, and your contrition, that interest in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, which is freely offered “to all who truly turn to him.”³

The conclusion of the parable warns us to be wise in time, and not to trust to any such late repentance.

10. *And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.*

11. *Afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.*

12. *But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*

13. *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*

This parable gives indeed a strong reason why all should watch, and be habitually prepared. And the words in which the unrighteous are excluded, point out what habitual preparation is. *Verily I say unto you, I know you not.* Those, then, who are really heirs of salvation, must be known to their Lord by certain signs. They must have been known to him by their faith, leading them to give up other grounds of confidence. They must have been known to him by their practice, as setting their affections on things above; as living to him who died for them; as denying themselves the lusts of the flesh, and the vanities of the world, as far as they are inconsistent with the commands of God. In this

³ Communion Service.

manner our Lord himself tells us, that he knows them that are his. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me : and I give unto them eternal life : and they shall never perish.”⁴ These, he assures us, shall enter with him to the marriage. “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”

Watch therefore ; for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh. Think no labour, no self-denial, no means of grace within your reach too much ; that when you are summoned, you may be found ready ; “your loins girded, and your lights burning, and yourselves like men that are waiting for their Lord.”

LECTURE LXII.

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

MATT. XXV. 14—30.

(Luke xix. 12—27.)

14. *For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.*

15. *And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one ; to every man according to his several ability ; and straightway took his journey.*

⁴ John x. 27.

In this parable is explained to us the condition of Christians in the world, as the servants of God ; *his own servants* in an especial manner, as bound to him by the obligations of their baptism ; as those to whom he has appointed duties, and whom he makes accountable for the discharge of those duties.

He delivers to them his goods. Not to all in an uniform portion ; but a portion to all ; and *to every man according to his several ability*. We have “ gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.”¹ There are diversities of gifts,” both in the ministers of the church and the world at large. For the *talents* here distributed, represent the various powers and opportunities which each individual enjoys, both of doing good and of receiving good ; represent abilities, whether of education, or of natural understanding ; represent the advantages of health, of time, of fortune, of influence. Men possess them in very different degrees ; but all possess some of them, and may use them as they pass through life, either to no purpose, or to a bad purpose, or to a good purpose ; may employ them to further the object for which they were intended, that of serving God ; or for their own objects, with no regard to God’s will at all ; or, still worse, even to oppose his will and violate his commands.

16. *Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.*

17. *And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.*

This describes the conduct of those who use

¹ Rom. xii. 6.

rightly the opportunities and powers bestowed on them. It describes those who use their knowledge to inform and instruct ; as Paul, whilst waiting at Athens, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. "Therefore disputed he with the Jews, and in the synagogues, and with the devout persons, and in the markets daily with them that met with him."² Had he remained silent, though sent with no especial commission to Athens, he would have hidden the talent entrusted to him.

Those also are *trading with their talents*, who use their power and influence to restrain evil and promote the glory of God : like those kings of Israel who corrected the prevailing idolatry ; as Hezekiah, when he "removed the high places and brake the images, and cut down the groves : " or as Joshua, who declares, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Those also are trading with their talents, who make use of the scriptures to live by ; as the Bereans, whose praise it was that "they searched the scriptures daily, to see whether the things were so" as Paul affirmed :³ those who employ their time to "work out their salvation," remembering that "the time is short ;" who use their wealth to promote the useful works of industry, and the needful duties of charity, and so "lay up a good foundation against the time to come." What a different world would ours be, if all so used their leisure, and their knowledge, and their money, and their influence !

² See Acts xvii. 17.

Acts xvii. 11.

Too many neglect this altogether, and live only to themselves. These are described in what follows.

18. *But he that had received one, went and digged in the earth, and hid his Lord's money.*

I need hardly explain what it is, to *hide the Lord's money*. It is, when the scriptures are in our hands, to neglect and despise them. It is, when we have the means of instructing the young and ignorant, or of guiding those independent on us, to leave them untaught, not noticed, not cared for. It is to consume time in idle amusements, and money in selfish luxury. This is to hide our Lord's talent. And it is the nature of that state of moral trial in which we are placed on earth, that every man, in every rank, shall have the power to improve or to abuse his talents of fortune, his talents of authority, his talents of grace, his talents of education, unchecked by any voice except the voice of conscience. It pleases God to "know what is in his heart;" whether he has that faith in the Son of God, which overcomes the world.⁴

19. *After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.*

20. *And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.*

21. *His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

⁴ 1 John v. 24.

22. *He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents : behold I have gained two other talents beside them.*

23. *His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant : thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make the ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

This is the scene which we should anticipate in our minds, whenever the way of duty appears hard. It must have its difficulties, if it is the right way ; for the right way is described as narrow, and as being pursued against natural inclination, against the arts of Satan, against the course of this world. But would he who had been faithful in the use of his talents, cast a thought back upon difficulties, when he heard the sentence, *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?* He would be lost in thankfulness and gratitude. For who “made him to differ” from another? what had he, “that he had not received?” It is thus that God approves himself a God of mercy. He raises us up from the dust of the earth ; he bestows upon us talents, more or less, according to our several ability ; and then he rewards with eternal happiness those who have used in his service the talents which he himself bestows. Truly may we say, with the Psalmist, “Gracious is the Lord, and righteous ; yea, our God is merciful.”

But our sense of his goodness must not exclude our conviction of his justice. We are forcibly warned of this by the doom of that servant, who had received his one talent, and now came and confessed that he had neglected it.

24. *Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed :*

25. *And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, there thou hast that is thine.*

26. *His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed.^a*

27. *Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers ; and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.*

28. *Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.*

29. *For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance : but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.*

30. *And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

We cannot read this, without an awful reflection on the case of those who appear to run through life with a vain confidence that no reckoning shall be made, no judgment follow. When we consider in what way many use, or rather fail to use, all the gifts of nature and of grace, of education and of fortune, might we not be disposed to say, Surely it has been revealed to these, that their lives shall never be inquired into. Conceive a stranger to our world to behold one man misusing his faculties to destroy the best and holiest feelings of his fellow-creatures ; another employing the gifts of wit or

^a That is, such was thy wicked opinion. Therefore “out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.” Thou oughtest to have acted according to that opinion.

eloquence to scoff at the gracious Giver ; another wasting the blessings of superior fortune in vice and extravagance ; another using his influence over the young and inexperienced to draw them into evil ; another trifling away the short space allowed him in amusements probably hurtful, and at least unprofitable : would he not ask, Can these be the talents of time, and of ability, and of wealth, and of authority, for which he who has the most entrusted to him, is the most awfully responsible ? How striking are the Judge's words, *at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.* Your advice might have turned many from their evil way ; your genius might have recommended religion ; your leisure might have instructed the ignorant ; your superfluous wealth might have relieved the distress of many of my afflicted servants ; and thus at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. *Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

May the Spirit of God enlighten us to discern the talents which belong to our respective stations and acquirements, and the way in which it is his will that we should *trade with them* : that whether over many things or over few, we may be found faithful, and admitted to *the joy of our Lord.*

LECTURE LXIII.

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE LAST JUDGMENT DESCRIBED.

MATT. xxv. 31—46.

31. *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.*

32. *And before him shall be gathered all nations : and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats :*

33. *And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.*

A description is here given us of that awful day, which shall assign their everlasting destiny to all the children of Adam. A description uttered by him who is himself the arbiter of that destiny. He who will be himself judge, declares the grounds of his judgment. He who is “the door” of the heavenly kingdom, declares whom he will admit, and whom he will exclude. He to whom “all things are delivered of the Father,”¹ declares in what manner he will execute his trust. “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth :” “the Lord, even the most mighty God, hath spoken.”

¹ Matt. xi. 27.

34. *Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world :*

35. *For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in.*

36. *Naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*

37. *Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee ; or thirsty, and gave thee drink ?*

38. *When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ? or naked, and clothed thee ?*

39. *Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee ?*

40. *And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

It is remarkable, that the criterion of character here brought forward, is taken entirely from works of mercy and charity. You have clothed the naked, and relieved the hungry, and visited the prisoner : what is done to the least of these my brethren, is done unto me : *Come, ye blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

This, at first sight, seems opposed to the whole tenor of the gospel, which declares that “ we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works and deservings :”² that “ by grace we are saved ; not of works, lest any man

should boast :” that so far from relying upon our good deeds, our justice, our integrity, our zeal, or our charity, our language is to be, when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants,” who can advance no claim.

The account, however, of the day of judgment, here given, does not contradict this truth. But it discloses the real nature of faith in Christ Jesus ; which is not a mere assent to the history of his Advent and Incarnation ; which is not a presumptuous confidence in his merits : but is the “ receiving him” with the whole heart, as the “ the way, the truth, and the life :” alike the Redeemer to atone, and the King or Lord to guide and rule. This is the faith which unites him to us, and us to him. This is the faith by which “ he is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” This is the faith according to which “ man believeth unto righteousness.”

And this faith will naturally and necessarily lead to the works here described of active charity.

For, first, those who have this faith, obey their Lord’s precepts. And his precepts tell us, that the characteristic of his disciples is to “ have love one towards another :” and that the law and the prophets are all comprehended in this, that, “ whatsoever we would that men should do unto us, we do also unto them.”

Secondly, those who have genuine faith in Christ will imitate his example. And we well know that his example was the model of that benevolence which his precepts enjoin. If, then, he “ went

about doing good," so must his disciples. "If he so loved us," as our faith avows that he did, "we ought also to love one another."

Thirdly, those who truly believe in Christ, learn of him to view their fellow-creatures in a light peculiar to the Christian: for their fellow-creatures are those whom he so loved, as to descend from heaven for their redemption: those whom he so pitied, as to lay down his life for their sakes. And therefore it is, that if hungry, they are to be fed; if naked, they are to be clothed; if strangers, they are to be cared for; if sick, or in prison, they are to be visited; if erring, they are to be reclaimed; if young, they are to be nurtured; if ignorant, they are to be instructed. Thus manifesting our "love not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth, we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him." For he has said, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

Those, then, who are here represented as the righteous, who "go into life eternal," are rewarded for their works. But the ground of their acceptance is still their faith. And the cause why they have wrought these works, is their faith. Faith is the principle, works, the effect. Holiness, purity, temperance, integrity, mercy, charity, are proofs of the existence, and of the soundness of the principle from which they spring.

The same argument applies to those on the left hand, who are rejected.

41. *Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels :*

42. *For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink :*

43. *I was a stranger, and ye took me not in : naked, and ye clothed me not : sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.*

44. *Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee ?*

45. *Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.*

46. *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment ; but the righteous into life eternal.*

We may be certain, then, that according to the spirit of this passage, the Son will pronounce sentence, *when he comes in his glory. Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me.* Had ye believed in me, ye would not have left the naked without clothing, or the hungry without food, or the sick, and the prisoner, without relief in their affliction. Had ye believed in me, ye must have pitied and assisted those wants, which both by precept and example I warned you to consider. “Depart from me, I never knew you.” Because the absence of brotherly kindness and charity is proof of the absence or the inefficacy of that on which all depends: is evidence discernible by men, of the absence of that inward principle which men cannot discern, but which He discerns who knows what is in men: absence of that genuine faith, which, wherever it exists, must pro-

duce active love towards all our fellow-creatures. So that one way in which we are taught to “know that we have passed from death unto life,” is “because we love the brethren.” “He that loveth not his brother, abideth in death.”³

Be it remembered, then, that in the description here given us of the judgment-day, the one class is accepted, not because they had works independently of faith, but because their faith in the Redeemer “wrought with their works, and by works was their faith made perfect.”⁴ While the other class is rejected, not because they had no works to justify and save them: (for what would be the hope of any man, if he trusted to be saved or justified by anything he had done or can do?) but because their conduct had shown, that they had no real faith in him whom they had been used to call by the name of Lord and Saviour. “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”⁵

, 1 John iii. 14.

⁴ See James ii. 22.

⁵ James ii. 26.

LECTURE LXIV.

OINTMENT POURED UPON THE HEAD OF JESUS.

MATT. xxvi. 1—13.

(Mark xiv. 1—9. Luke xxii. 1—2.)

1. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples,*

2. *Ye know that after two days is the feast of the pass-over, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.*

3. *Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas,*

4. *And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him.*

5. *But they said, Not on the feast-day, lest there be an uproar among the people.*

“The common people heard him gladly :” the common people were benefited by his works of mercy and pity ; the common people had no private interest to make them dread his growing influence, neither had their vices in the same degree provoked his severe reproofs. Therefore, as in the case of John the Baptist, Herod “feared the people, because all counted John for a prophet,”—so now the chief priests and elders, in apprehending Jesus, saw reason to avoid the *uproar of the people*. And thus by the operation of various unseen motives, the “determinate counsel of God” received its execution.

(John xii. 2—27.)

6. *Now when Jesus was in Bethany,¹ in the house of Simon the leper,*

7. *There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.*

St. John tells us,² that this was Mary, sister of Martha and of Lazarus. She had always shown peculiar attachment to our Lord, and to his instructions: she had “sat at his feet, and heard his word.” And this had been lately increased by the wonderful restoration of her brother to life. So she seized the opportunity of testifying her reverence and love in a manner which proved its overflowing fulness. According to the custom of that age and country, she could have given no higher token of her respect, than by pouring out upon his head this “ointment of spikenard, very precious.” To our habits, the action appears extraordinary: but it was well understood by those who witnessed it. Perfumed oil, or ointment, was poured upon the head of kings and priests, and other distinguished persons, at sumptuous feasts, as well as on solemn occasions; and hence became the common emblem of gladness, wealth, and plenty. Where David (in Psalm xxiii.) is recounting the mercies of God, he says, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. *Thou anointest mine head with oil; and my cup*

¹ At this period, he visited Jerusalem in the day-time: and in the evening returned to lodge at the neighbouring village of Bethany.

² John xi. 2.

shall be full.” When the blessings of unity and concord are to be extolled, they are compared to the *precious ointment which was poured upon the head* of Aaron. And among the ways in which cheerfulness is to be shown, and the ostentation of repentance to be avoided, our Lord himself had said, “Thou, when thou fastest, *anoint thine head*, that thou appear not unto men to fast.”

Mary, therefore, in making this use of the *alabaster box of very precious ointment* which she had in her possession, did the greatest thing in her power to display her attachment and admiration of our Lord.

She had reason. She was persuaded that he was the Christ, the beloved Son of God, the Saviour of the world. Therefore, no sign of respect could possibly be too great for him. But, further, she had particular and personal obligations to him. He had exercised his power as Son of God, as Saviour, in restoring her dearest relation. And, beyond all, she had chosen the good part: and she knew within herself, that he had led her to choose it, and enabled her to keep it. Were there no other proofs of the excellence of religion and piety, it is sufficiently declared by the gratitude which the pious and good feel towards those who have been instruments of spiritual improvement to them. Whilst the affections are still entangled with things below, and sinful objects, or worldly objects, have the chief hold upon the mind, all exhortation, and warning, and instruction, is indignantly rejected. Men refuse to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. But whenever the

Spirit of God has effected a change in this respect, then no expressions of thankfulness, and no return of kindness, seem sufficient to satisfy the feelings of the heart towards any who have contributed to produce it. When the ways of wisdom are experienced to be ways of peace and pleasantness, those become dearest to our thoughts and feelings, who have been the means of turning our feet into such pleasant paths.

Conduct, however, which is both well meant and well directed, does not always meet with its due acknowledgment. This action of Mary's, like many other actions, might be taken in two ways: might be applauded as a sign of love, or might be blamed for its extravagance. And there is not universally that charity which hopeth all things.

8. *But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?*

9. *For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.*

10. *When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.*

11. *For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.*

12. *For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.*

13. *Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial for her.*

Our Lord well knew, that in two days from the hour in which he was speaking, his body would be taken down from the cross, and laid in the tomb.

And he well knew that his apostles then would never judge or complain of any respect that could be shown to his memory. Mary, unknown to herself, had anticipated the embalming of his body. She had done it *for his burial*.

This he prophetically declared. And he also prophetically declared, that though many of the things which he himself both did and said, have not been recorded,³ this *good work* should be recorded, and *told for a memorial of her* who wrought it. So it has proved : and wherever it is told as a memorial, it assures us of this, that God will behold with approbation the things which are done in a desire to show him honour ; and is more likely to excuse zeal than coldness. Whatever is designed for the service of God, and intended to promote his glory, let it be well considered, lest it mar the cause which we desire to serve. But with this due caution, the effect of love towards God, should resemble the effect of love towards our fellow-creature ; where no one is afraid of betraying too much ardour, but all the apprehension is, lest their expressions or their services should fail in doing justice to their feelings. There is nothing in what Mary did, but what might have been done on the justest principles of prudence. This *alabaster box of very precious ointment* was reserved for some occasion of extraordinary hospitality or festivity : for a marriage-feast, or a guest of unusual dignity. Where could it be better used, than to honour one who was to her more than guest, or friend, or bro-

³ See John xx. 30.

ther, or husband? And *we* may as justly consider, that the proper employment of God's gifts, of fortune, or of faculties, of influence, or of knowledge, is in promoting the glory of Him who bestows them. Whatever sign of gratitude we show, we shall not exceed the rule of the commandment, which enjoins us to "love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind."

LECTURE LXV.

JUDAS BETRAYS JESUS.—THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER INSTITUTED.

MATT. xxvi. 14—29.

(Mark xiv. 10—23. Luke xxii. 7—20. John xiii. 21.)

14. *Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests,*

15. *And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.*

16. *And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.*

This is one of the many passages of Scripture, which show us how the counsels of God are accomplished through the natural dispositions or passions of men. The Son of man was to be betrayed into

the hands of sinners : so he had frequently foretold. But if he was to be betrayed, there must needs be a traitor. Among the twelve apostles, is one whose heart had never been so far converted by all that he had seen and heard, as to relinquish the sin of covetousness. St. John acquaints us, that it was he who chiefly objected to the expensive mark of attachment shown by Mary, and just before related, “not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.”¹ The same disposition was now operating upon his mind. Perhaps he thought that Jesus was determined to give himself up to his enemies ; perhaps he thought that he might deliver himself out of the hands of his enemies, though betrayed to them ; but however this might be, he would not lose the opportunity of making an advantage to himself. So he *went unto the chief priests and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you ? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.*

The thirty pieces of silver were indeed “a goodly price” at which the Son of man was valued !² It was the sum appointed in the law as the recompence to a master for the loss of a slave, who might have been accidentally slain. But thus was brought to pass the saying which was written, “He was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

17. *Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover ?*

¹ John xii. 6.

² See the remarkable prophecy, Zech. xi. 12, 13.

18. *And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand ; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.*

19. *And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them ; and they made ready the passover.*

20. *Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.*

21. *And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*

22. *And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I ?*

23. *And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.*

24. *The Son of man goeth as it is written of him : but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed ! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

25. *Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I ? He said unto him, Thou hast said.*

By this unexpected warning, an opportunity is offered to Judas of retracting his secret design. "With the temptation a way is made to escape." But repentance is not in his heart, and Satan leads him captive at his will.

26. *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body.*

27. *And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it ;*

28. *For this is my blood of the new testament,³ which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

29. *But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of*

³ New covenant, new dispensation. "Behold, the day is come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah."—Jer. xxxi. 31.

this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

Such was the origin of that institution, which Christians have ever since observed as a memorial of their crucified Redeemer. It was probable that some mode would be appointed in which those who trusted to the atonement which he made, might declare the ground of their hope, the object of their faith. The law of Moses had ordained certain regular festivals, reminding the Jewish nation of the various mercies shown them. At the present moment the disciples were celebrating the principal of these, which commemorated the deliverance of their ancestors from Egypt, the beginning of their existence as a nation. Hereafter they were to commemorate, in a similar, though more simple manner, a far greater deliverance, which rendered them still more peculiarly the people of the Lord.

The ceremony is strongly significant of that spiritual life of which Christ is the author and preserver. *Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it ; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* The bread, however, was not *his body*, nor the wine *his blood*, except in a figure. The one, then, was to remind them of the other. The figure was to recal the reality. The bread was to recal to their minds, that his body broken for them was the price of their redemption. *Take, eat ; this is my*

body. This is my body, which shall be broken for you, when I bear your sins upon the cross, even as this bread is broken in my hands. And as the bread which I bless and break, is nourishment to the eater ; so this my body, is the bread of life ; “the living bread which came down from heaven :” “my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world :” “if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.”⁴

Again ; the blood was to remind them of the sacrifice which their salvation cost, because “without shedding of blood is no remission,” but “the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.” *Drink ye all of this ; this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.* This is “the blood of the everlasting covenant,” which “whoever drinketh, hath eternal life : and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Such is the idea conveyed in this figurative appointment, and expressed by the words in which, from the earliest times, the Sacrament has been administered. “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee ; the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee ; preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life ! Take and eat this ; drink this ; in remembrance that Christ died for thee, that his blood was shed for thee, and be thankful.”

So that the Lord’s Supper is a sign of faith, and an exercise of faith ; and in proportion as that faith is sincere and ardent, may expect a blessing. It is an acknowledgment of our believing that Christ

⁴ See John vi. 50, &c.

did “bear our sins in his own body on the tree:” a confession that we look to the ransom of his blood for our acceptance with God: that through this faith we desire to work out our salvation; that as the bread is the most universal nourishment, and wine the most salutary cordial, to the human frame, so in the virtue of Christ’s propitiation, we seek support and refreshment “in all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth; in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.”

Those who are void of this lively faith, though they outwardly partake of “the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, yet, in no wise, are they partakers of Christ.”⁵ But let the sincere Christian draw near, and take this holy Sacrament to his comfort. He will thus be brought to comprehend, more fully, the mysterious words which are only spoken to the ear of faith: “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.”⁶

⁵ Art. xxix.

⁶ John vi. 56.

LECTURE LXVI.

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE.

MATT. xxvi. 30—44.

(Mark xiv. 30—40. Luke xxii. 31—44.)

30. *And when they had sung an hymn,¹ they went out into the mount of Olives.*

31. *Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.²*

32. *But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.*

33. *Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.*

34. *Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow,³ thou shalt deny me thrice.*

35. *Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.*

The disciples, and especially Peter, who stood most forward on this occasion, had not yet experienced their own weakness. They made their declaration in entire sincerity, and with full intention of acting up to it. "The spirit was willing;" and in the willingness of their spirit, dangers seemed

¹ This was usual with the Jews after their repasts; and a portion of the psalms (from 112th to 119th) was appropriated to the feast of the passover.

² Zech. xiii. 7.

³ Before the morning dawn.

trifling, and failure impossible. The flesh proved weak ; and, doubtless, they learnt an useful lesson, useful in the work appointed them, “ not to be high-minded,” but to “ fear.”

It does not follow, because resolutions are sometimes broken, that therefore it is not good to make resolutions. They must be made, or there is no hope of stedfastness. A fixed resolve must be entered into, to follow the laws of Christ at any risk or sacrifice. Such a resolve, sincerely formed, will be supported by that grace from above which renders the spirit willing, and strengthens the infirmity of the flesh. God will pity the weakness of his frail but devoted servants, and will enable them to do what Peter afterwards both practised and prescribed, to “ add to their faith, virtue,” a steady determination to live by the rules which their judgment, their “ inward man,” approves. The Israelites were commended when they “ answered together” to the words of Moses :⁴ “ All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” “ All that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, we will hear it and do it.” Those who make such an engagement, may fail to keep it stedfastly ; but those who refuse to make it, are far less likely to prove obedient. There must be a resolute beginning if we hope to endure unto the end.

36. *Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane,⁵ and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.*

⁴ Exod. xix. 8. Deut. v. 27.

⁵ Or “ the place of oil presses.” On the mount of Olives.

37. *And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.*

38. *Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death : tarry ye here, and watch with me.*

39. *And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

40. *And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour ?*

41. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation : the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

42. *He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.*

43. *And he came and found them asleep again : for their eyes were heavy.*

44. *And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.*

The Redeemer of the world, on this remarkable occasion, looks forward to the suffering which he had engaged to undergo. He looks forward to it with those feelings to which he had voluntarily subjected himself, in order that in our nature he might bear our penalty. And these feelings were, at the present moment, allowed to oppress him with aggravated force, that the purpose of his mysterious sacrifice might be better understood and valued. The Spirit, which supports his disciples, for a while deserted him, that his disciples might learn more perfectly the lesson taught them by his death. *Therefore he prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.* If it be possible. If, consistently with the salvation of

“those whom thou hast given me,” this cross may not actually be undergone, let the bitter draught be spared me. Certainly it was *possible* that the sacrifice should not be offered for the sins of men. “But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled?” We must also suppose it to have been *possible*, that sin should be pardoned though this sacrifice were not actually made. If God had seen fit, he might have proclaimed an amnesty without this condition : but he did not. It was right in his view, that the penalty for sin should be really paid.

Here, then, in this agony, we behold the nature of sin ; for we behold the Lord Jesus bearing its weight : bearing the curse of the law. For as St. Paul shows, (Galat. iii. 10—13,) it is written, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” “The transgression of the law is sin :” and “the wages of sin is death.” This concludes all mankind under a curse, for that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Christ interposes, and “redeems us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ; for again it is written, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” So that the indignation of God against sin is openly manifested, and yet the penitent believer in Christ is pardoned : “the promise by faith of Jesus Christ is given to them that believe.”

The practical lesson to be learnt here is very plain, and ought never to be absent from our minds. It is not consistent with the Father’s attributes that no evil consequence should follow the sins of men. Will He, it might be asked, will he

so heavily condemn sin in his creatures, as Scripture affirms? "God is love." But God loved his Son: and his Son here offers the prayer, *if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.* And the prayer was not granted: the cup of suffering was drunk. Such must be our reflection when we are disposed to extenuate the evil of sin; when that which ought to be most shocking, its awful frequency, prevents us from dreading or lamenting it as it ought to be dreaded and lamented both in ourselves and others.

Another practical inference follows, which ought no less to affect our hearts. The suffering which is here recorded, shows the extent of Christ's love. Had he suffered less, we should not have rightly known the greatness of that mercy which he exercised towards mankind. It was much, indeed, that "when he was rich" in the fulness of heavenly joy, he should "become poor," for man's sake, and descend to a world like ours. But that he should place himself under the fierceness of that divine wrath, from which his disciples are delivered, is a degree of love which "passes all understanding." One return he requires of us; one return we can attempt to make,—our gratitude; gratitude which is to be shown by obedience to his will. "Because we thus judge; that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them." This is the principle of the Christian's practice; and this principle ought to receive fresh strength from every fresh contemplation of that "precious death," from which our life, our real and spiritual life, is derived.

LECTURE LXVII.

JESUS BETRAYED, AND FORSAKEN BY HIS
DISCIPLES.

MATT. xxvi. 45—56.

45. *Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest : behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.*¹

46. *Rise, let us be going : behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.*

47. *And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.*

48. *Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he : hold him fast.*

49. *And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master ; and kissed him.*

50. *And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come ? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.*

51. *And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear.*³

¹ *Sleep on now.* This is no time when your exertions are required, or can avail to your Master or yourselves. .

² We learn from St. John xviii. 10, that this was Peter, who at the present moment felt ready to redeem the pledge which he had given not long before, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee."

52. *Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place : for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.*

53. *Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels ?*

54. *But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be ?*

It would have answered none of the purposes of our Lord's coming, that his kingdom should have been established by the exercise of irresistible power. Such power does not affect the heart, or gain any influence over the will of men, though it may constrain their actions. And the rule which the Christian is to follow, is that practised by his divine Master : "though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh : for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal." Whoever is so unwise as to employ such weapons, instead of gaining his object, must expect them to be turned against himself. He must expect neither success nor protection from above. *They that take the sword shall perish with the sword.*

If the apostles had now understood the purpose of our Lord's appointed death, they would not have been surprised at his yielding to his enemies. Yet they had seen enough of his power to perceive, had they recollected, that these enemies could do nothing against him, "unless it were given them from above." They are reminded of this. *Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, "and he shall give his angels charge concerning me?" But how then shall the Scriptures*

be fulfilled? Those Scriptures which predict that “Messiah shall be cut off;” that he shall be “led as a lamb to the slaughter:” “cut off out of the land of the living.”³ Still more those which promise that he shall be “wounded for our transgressions,” and that “the chastisement of our peace shall be on him.” Therefore “he poured out his soul unto death:” he “laid down his life of himself,” and “no man took it from him:” as the people ought to have been convinced, by what he proceeds to address to them.

•

55. *In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.*

56. *But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.*

His disciples were now, for the first time, thoroughly convinced that it was the intention of Jesus to surrender himself to his enemies. They were in earnest, no doubt, when they lately affirmed, “Though we should die with thee, yet will we not deny thee.” It is quite natural that they might have said this sincerely at the time, and yet afterwards have given way in the hour of danger and temptation. Indeed as far as appears, they might have been ready to die with him now, if he had consented to defend himself. But his declarations and his conduct showed, in a manner not to be mistaken, that this was not his inten-

³ See Dan. ix. 26 ; Is. liii.

tion. So *they all forsook him, and fled.* And it must be acknowledged that the tone of St. Matthew, who had been himself one of that company, when he here relates the fact of this flight and desertion, intimates a conscious recollection of timidity and dismay. Jesus indeed had said, *How then must the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?* He had plainly hinted, that what the “wicked hands” of the chief priests and elders were now doing, was done by “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” But as yet the disciples “knew not the scriptures;” did not understand that they would be accomplished by his death. And though long before the date of his writing this gospel, St. Matthew had been enlightened to perceive the meaning of those scriptures himself, and to expound it to others,—still, in his narrative, he is led by the Spirit to represent his former state of mind when the events took place, and never intermixes the knowledge of the apostle with the feelings of the disciple. Doubtless his conscience reminded him, that at that hour of despair, when “the power of darkness” prevailed, the feeling of himself, and of his brethren had been, that their own immediate safety must be consulted, and not that the design of the Incarnation must be fulfilled. Yielding to the crisis, *they all forsook him, and fled.*

We are in equal danger, when trial comes, of deserting the allegiance which we owe to the Redeemer. Our constancy is too often vanquished by difficulties far less than those which overcame these disciples. It is only by that “strength which is

made perfect in our weakness," that present evils are boldly met, present losses willingly undergone, present temptations successfully resisted. There was no intention on the part of Christ, that his disciples should be brought into immediate danger, still less that they should perish with him.⁴ The nature of his sacrifice admitted of no companion in suffering. Therefore he did not inspire them with resolution: but has left us this example as a testimony, that by his strength alone we can be enabled to "hold fast our integrity," even for a single day.

LECTURE LXVIII.

JESUS ARRAIGNED BEFORE CAIAPHAS.—DENIED BY PETER.

MATT. xxvi. 57—75.

57. *And they that laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high-priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.*

58. *But Peter followed him afar off unto the high-priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.*

⁴ See John xix. 8. "I have told you that I am he. If therefore ye seek me, *let these go their way.*"

59. *Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death ;*

60. *But found none : yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses,*

61. *And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.¹*

62. *And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing ? what is it which these witness against thee.*

63. *But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.*

64. *Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said : nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

It is as *thou hast said*. “I am the Christ, the Son of God.” But ye believe it not. “This is your hour, and the power of darkness.” Nevertheless, *hereafter* ye shall know, what now ye refuse to know. Ye shall see my divine authority confirmed by the destruction of your guilty city. Ye shall see it still more awfully, when I am *seated on the right hand of power*, to judge the world in righteousness.

This opens to our minds a reflection which it

¹ This is explained by St. John ii. 18. “The Jews said unto him,” early in his ministry, “What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things ? 19. Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 20. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days ? 21. But he spake of the temple of his body.”

may be profitable to dwell upon. How altered will be the thoughts of those who were then surrounding the seat of judgment, when they *hereafter see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven!* How quickly will flash into their minds the conviction of their guilt, and their consequent condemnation! This, then, before whom are gathered all nations, this is He who came in the flesh, who taught in our streets and our houses, Jesus of Nazareth: and called us to “repent, for the kingdom of heaven was at hand.” But we did not listen. Alas! why did we not? How gracious were his words! He told us that God sent him in love: “that the Son of man came not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.” He invited all to come unto him, and “find rest unto their souls.” But we trusted that we were Abraham’s children, and needed no repentance. We argued that no good thing could come out of Nazareth.

We now perceive that there was enough, and more than enough, to assure us that he was the Son of God. The prophets had foretold that the Christ should “preach the gospel to the poor:” and he did this. How great and how full of kindness were the miracles which he wrought! But the Pharisees told us that they were done through the power of Beelzebub. Could an evil tree bring forth good fruit? Could men gather grapes of thorns? Satan was evil, and the miracles were good: how then could they proceed from Satan? Truly we “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” We dreaded their scoffs, their

reproofs, and were afraid where no fear was, while we forgot the Lord our Maker. And besides, our “deeds were evil.” We did not desire repentance, or love holiness. So our hearts were hardened, and our eyes blinded. Did He not tell us, that we should feel what we now feel? That we should hereafter cry out, but in vain, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!” O why did we despise the words, which we now perceive, too late, to have been the words of truth and mercy?

Such, doubtless, will be the wretched consciousness, the self-condemning thoughts of many who now stood about the judgment-seat, demanding the death of Christ, and afterwards surrounded his cross, reviling and mocking him.

We, together with them, shall hereafter see him *sitting on the right hand of power*. Let us beware that we do not lay up for ourselves a like miserable recollection of opportunities neglected, and offers of mercy despised. What was uttered as a warning to those who heard it then, should be no less a warning to those who hear it now, that they may not perish through error, prejudice, or thoughtless folly. It is well, if this declaration sounds in their ears as an encouragement which they love to hear: as their support in difficulty, their consolation in sorrow;—that *hereafter they shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven*.

65. *Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.*

66. *What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.*

67. *Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him, and others smote him with the palms of their hands,*

68. *Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee?*

69. *Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.*

70. *But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.*

71. *And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.*

72. *And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.*

73. *And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.*

74. *Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.*

75. *And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.*

Such is the feebleness of man, when left to feel that feebleness. In the presence of Jesus, not long before, and in the company of friends, it had seemed impossible to Peter that he should renounce the faith in which he gloried. *Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.* But now, surrounded by enemies, and dismayed at the submission of his Master, he is an easy prey to the assaults of Satan. He loses all power over himself, denies the truth, and confirms his falsehood by repeated asseveration and perjury.

If we venture to ask, why this sin was permitted in the case of one who was so soon to become the leading founder of the church, and to be made one of its principal pillars; we may believe it to have been for his own sake, and for the sake of future generations. For his own sake, that he might be taught to distrust himself, and lean not on his own strength, which evidently, from his early history, was the natural bias of his character. And for the sake of many hereafter, who having fallen under the temptations of Satan, and having risen again, through grace, like Peter, might have the consolation of knowing, by actual example, that "all manner of sin and wickedness may be forgiven" unto those who repent and are converted, through the virtue of that blood which was now about to be shed for Peter and for many, "for the remission of sin." In the case of a chief apostle, "Jesus Christ first showed forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting."²

² See 1 Tim. i. 16.

LECTURE LXIX.

DEATH OF JUDAS.—CONDEMNATION OF JESUS.

MATT. xxvii. 1—26.

(Mark xv. 1—14. Luke xxiii. 1—23. John xviii. 28—40.)

1. *When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death :*

2. *And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.*

3. *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,*

4. *Saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us ? See thou to that.*

5. *And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

This passage forms a striking example of the cruel selfishness which belongs to the character of the wicked. Judas comes in the agonies of remorse for the evil of which he had been the instrument, and makes such reparation as he can, both in word and deed. He declares the innocence of his victim, he restores the price of his crime. All the comfort which he receives, even from those who by their station ought to have been his spiritual guides, is comprehended in this: We have obtained from you the advantage to which we

looked, and see thou to the rest ; your misery, your destruction, is your own concern.

Certainly the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. And those who look for the relentings of pity in the breasts of any who have seduced them into sin, and to whose seductions they have yielded, look for that which they will never find. Such hearts are seared, and all their feelings selfish. Very different would be the conduct of one influenced by the Spirit of God. He eagerly watches the first turn of the labouring conscience, and instead of urging a self-convicted sinner to despair, points out the way of repentance.

For it is further to be observed from this passage, that all sorrow which follows sin is not the godly sorrow of real penitence. It is not certain that the sons of Jacob were penitent, though they said, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not ^{hear} here: therefore is this distress come upon us."¹ It is quite certain that Pharaoh was not penitent, though he acknowledged to Moses, "I have sinned against the Lord your God." "Now, therefore, forgive, I pray thee, my sins only this once."² Judas here confesses, that "he had sinned." And the anguish of his mind may be conceived from the effect; *he departed, and went and hanged himself*. Yet, since such was allowed to be the effect of his remorse, we may be assured that he felt none of that humble movement of the mind towards God, none of

¹ Gen. xlii. 21.

² Exod. x. 16.

that real contrition for sin as “the transgression of the law,” which belongs to true repentance. His heart was not softened, like that of Peter, when “he went out and wept bitterly.” So he was suffered to reap the reward of his iniquity ; and to anticipate his final condemnation. We learn, too, from the account in the Acts, that some shocking circumstances attended his self-destruction. “Falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.”³ So soon was the Lord’s compassionate prediction verified, “It had been good for that man if he had not been born.”

6. *And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.*

7. *And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in.*

8. *Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.*

9. *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, and they took the thirty pieces of silver the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value ;*

10. *And gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord appointed me.*⁴

11. *And Jesus stood before the governor : and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews ? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.*

³ Acts i. 18.

⁴ The passage here alluded to, occurs not in Jeremiah, but in Zechariah xi. 12. “I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price ; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter, a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.”

12. *And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.*

13. *Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee ?*

14. *And he answered him to never a word ; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.*

15. *Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would.*

16. *And they had then a notable prisoner, called .*

17. *Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you ? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ ?*

18. *For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.*

19. *When he was set down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man : for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.*

20. *But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.*

21. *The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you ? They said, Barabbas.*

22. *Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.*

23. *And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done ? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.*

24. *When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person : see ye to it.*

25. *Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.*

26. *Then released he Barabbas unto them : and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*

⁵ “ Who for a certain sedition, made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.” Luke xxiii. 18.

It was provided under the law of Moses, in certain cases of death of which the author was undiscovered, "that all the elders of the city next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands, and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it."⁷ Similar customs have prevailed in other countries and times; and led the way to the symbolical action of Pilate's, by which he attempted to clear himself of guilt. But in vain. He who had "power to condemn and power to release," as he had himself avowed, could not allege with truth, "our hands have not shed this blood."

To protest against evil which we have no other means of preventing, may be the best means of delivering our souls from its guilt. "If thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity: but thou hast delivered thy soul."⁸ The conduct of Pilate here was very different. He protests against evil which he had the power of preventing. He acts in defiance of the warning which had been providentially sent him, that he might be without excuse. His wife had heard the fame of Jesus: and her mind was filled with what had been reported of his character and deeds of mercy and power. These thoughts occur to her in a dream; and she advises her husband, *have thou nothing to do with that just man*. In defiance of this message, which ought to have strengthened the dictates of his own conscience and reason, he becomes a party to the death of Jesus, because he was willing to show the Jews a pleasure, and because he was afraid of their accusing

⁷ See Deut. xxi. 6.

⁸ Ezek. xxxiii. 9.

him to Cæsar. Under such circumstances, how vain to assert his innocence ! We may say with the prophet, "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God !" ⁹ But there are many ways in which men deceive their own souls, and conceal their sin from themselves. Alas ! how easily is the mind satisfied, when a strong worldly impulse is opposed to the line of duty !

That blood which Pilate was so anxious to be clear of, the Jews were no less ready to take upon themselves. *His blood be on us and on our children !* It did indeed fall on them, and not for that purpose for which it was mercifully shed—not to save, but to condemn.

Let us turn their impious prayer into one more conformable to God's will. Let us entreat that *the blood of Christ may be upon us and upon our children*, not to testify against us, but to cleanse us from all iniquity ; to purify our thoughts and desires, to sanctify our life and actions.

⁹ Jer. xi. 22.

LECTURE LXX.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

MATT. xxvii. 27—44.

(Mark xv. 1—33. Luke xxiii. 26—43. John xix. 1—11.)

27. *Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.*

28. *And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.*

29. *And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand : and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews !*

30. *And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.*

31. *And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.*

32. *And as they came out,¹ they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name : him they compelled to bear his cross.*

33. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,*

34. *They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall : and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.²*

¹ Out of the city. Offenders were not executed within the walls. 1 Kings xxi. 13. "Then they carried Naboth forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died." See also Heb. xv. 35. Hence St. Paul's allusion, Heb. xiii. 12, 13.

² It is supposed that this was usually given to diminish sensibility, and was on that account refused by Jesus. See Ps. lxix. 21, and Mark xv. 23.

35. *And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet,³ They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.*

36. *And sitting down they watched him there ;*

37. *And set up over his head his accusation written,*
THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

We cannot read this account, without inquiring why such things took place. More especially as the malice of the chief priests, and the cruelty of the soldiers, only accomplished what had been appointed by “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” Many things concurred, which if they had not concurred, Jesus might have been put to death, but it would not have been the death of the cross. He would have died by stoning, if, as Pilate wished, the Jews had taken him, and executed him according to their law.

But CRUCIFIXION was the punishment, which in the wisdom of God was chosen, to show that Christ suffered for sin—for the sin of the world. As St. Paul expresses it, “in that he died, he died unto sin.” And because he died unto sin, he chose the death of the cross, the worst death of the vilest sinners. Had he died an ordinary death, he would have died indeed, as human nature must die ; he would have borne our nature, but he would not have borne our sins. Had he died by the hands of the Jewish multitude, his death might have seemed the work of their enmity, rather than of God’s judgment. But by choosing the death of the cross, he proved that he died *unto sin* ; that the sin

³ David is the prophet meant, Ps. xxii. 18.

which he undertook to atone for, was the cause of his death ; that he gave himself a sacrifice to the justice of his offended Father.

Consider then the cross of Christ as a monument raised once for all, and for ever standing, to show the consequences of sin. To show that sin is hateful to God as the governor of the world, because it is contrary to his will, contrary to his commands, and contrary to his nature. And to show that it is ruinous to man ; and that whoso commits it, is liable to the eternal wrath of Him, “who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.”

Here then is a lesson for all who are transgressors, wilful transgressors, of the divine law, and say with the infidels of old, “God careth not for it ;” “God will not do good, neither will he do evil.” To all such—nay, to all who have not applied to themselves the means of peace and reconciliation with God, and therefore are “yet in their sins”—to all such, the picture which we are contemplating affords an awful warning. Let them behold the Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world, and so judge of its burthen. Behold him crowned with thorns ; mocked with the emblems of royalty. Behold him smitten ; sinking under the weight of the cross prepared for his own torture.⁴ Behold him fastened to it ; lifted up upon it ; reviled and mocked even by his companions in suffering ; behold all this, and so judge of the heinousness of sin,

⁴ Such is the probable explanation of verse 32, compared with John xix. 17, which says, Jesus, “bearing his cross, went forth.” He was found incapable of bearing it far, or bearing it alone, and it was placed on Simon.

thus estimate the misery of its consequences. But who can behold this, and then return to that from which he came to rescue them: to their carelessness, their worldliness, their sinfulness? Surely the cross of Christ is a sufficient testimony of the end awaiting those who forget, or who defy God.

38. *Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.*

39. *And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,*

40. *And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.*

41. *Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,*

42. *He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.*

43. *He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.*

44. *The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

Thus was the prophecy accomplished, "Yet we did esteem him smitten, stricken of God, and afflicted!" That God did not deliver Jesus, was thought to be the refutation of his pretensions, whilst really it confirmed them all. *He saved others, himself he cannot save!* This was most scripturally true. In the sense intended by the revilers themselves, we know that it was not true. Even they could scarcely doubt our Lord's power to have saved himself from the cruelty of his enemies. He had already done so on many different occasions. Throughout his life he had shown him-

self to be in possession of means which would have enabled him, with ease, to crush whatever dared oppose him. This was implied in the acknowledgment, *he saved others*.

But in another sense, little understood by those who uttered the words, those words were true, *himself he cannot save*. He could not *come down from the cross*, and deliver himself from the punishment which he had undertaken to bear, without frustrating the plan prepared for man's redemption. We were recently considering, how, in the agony of his human nature, he prayed to his Father, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" But no sooner had he said, according to the dictates of his human nature, "Father, save me from this hour;" than he added, in his divine wisdom, "yet for this cause came I to this hour." The same goodness which led him to offer the ransom, determined him to endure unto the end, and forbade his using his divine power to save himself, before all things had been fulfilled which justice required him to undergo: before having submitted to the full weight of divine wrath, he was enabled to say, "It is finished: and bowed the head, and gave up the ghost."

So far, then his enemies, though not knowing what they said, declared truly, *himself he cannot save*.

And, blessed be God! no less accurate is the remainder of the sentence, *he saved others*. By those very sorrows which he could not be exempted from suffering, by that very purpose of God which made it impossible that he should *save himself*, *he saved*

others. His weakness, then, is our strength, now and for ever. “Surely he bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows; he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.” Through him alone, through the sufferings which he consented to undergo, is promised to those who trust in him remission of sins.

If then we are “bought with this price,” with a price so costly, let us remember that “we are not our own:” and that he who bore so heavy a cross for us, has said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

LECTURE LXXI.

SIGNS ATTENDING THE DEATH OF JESUS.

MATT. xxvii. 45—56.

We return to the cross on which the Son of man was lifted up; was lifted up, that we might look on Him, and be saved; but who was now surrounded by those who mocked his suffering and denied his power. The elements, however, the material world, acknowledged Him, “by whom all things were made.”

(Mark xv. 33—47. Luke xxiii. 44—56. John xix. 26—41.)

45. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*

46. *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*¹

47. *Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.*

48. *And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.*²

49. *The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.*

50. *Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.*

51. *And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;*

52. *And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,*

53. *And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.*

54. *Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

55. *And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him:*

56. *Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.*

It was to be expected that the death of Christ Jesus should be attended with extraordinary signs.

¹ Ps. xxii. 1. Quoted in the Syro-Chaldaic dialect, probably as then spoken in Judea; and not rightly understood by all the bystanders.

² For we learn from St. John, that he had also said, "I thirst."

The accomplishment of the original promise ; the conclusion of a long series of prophecy and preparation ; the completion of a mighty sacrifice for the sins of men ; the consummation of wickedness in the Jewish people,—an event like this might well be marked by a testimony from heaven. And it was so. *Jesus yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.* This veil or curtain separated one part of the temple from the other : the holy from the most holy ; that part where the people stood and worshipped, from that which the high priest entered, and where he offered sacrifice. This *veil was rent* : showing, first, that the Jewish law, and worship established by Moses was at an end, being set aside by Him, of whom “Moses and the prophets did write ;” and showing, further, that there is no longer a distance, a separation between God and man, but that all alike, Jew and Gentile, all who believe in Christ, have access to God by that “new and living way which he has consecrated for us,” and may “come boldly to the throne of grace.”

Further, *the earth did quake, and the rocks were rent.* Well might the earth quake, and “the stones cry out,” at the wickedness which was committed in it. Perfect goodness had appeared in the world, and the corrupt world could not bear the sight. “Shall not the land tremble for this ?”

Further, still, *the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints arose, and came out of their*

³ See Heb. x. 19—22.

graves after his resurrection, and appeared unto many. This was the earnest of the last day and the general resurrection: the first-fruits of that great harvest, “when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

These remarkable signs were so evident to the *centurion and those that were with him, watching Jesus, that they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

A glorious, but a late confession. Glorious to him of whom it was made; but late for those who made it. The centurion, indeed, as a Roman, had, perhaps, heard little of our Lord, of his doctrines, of his miracles. But it was late indeed for the Jewish people, who had blinded their eyes to the proofs of his Messiahship, who had rejected him that came to save them, and crucified the “Prince of life:” it was late for them to confess, now that their guilt was committed and their condemnation sealed, *Truly this was the Son of God.* It is a confession, which, made in time, brings a blessing with it. For He has said, “whosoever will confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” But it will be an awful thing for any to make my confession, when it can no longer profit: to own Christ as the Saviour of the world, when even He can no longer save. And the time will come, when all shall confess it. The Jews, who rejected and crucified him: the Gentiles, who deemed the preaching of the

cross “foolishness:” the thoughtless, who have cared for none of these things: the unbelievers, who have mocked and scorned: all these, as well as those who have believed and obeyed, will at last join in the same confession. The convulsion of the earth which took place at his death, when the rocks were rent asunder, is but a feeble example of that awful day when “the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved.” The bodies of saints which arose and came out of their graves, are but a small sample of the multitude which no man can number, which shall stand about the throne, to be rewarded according to their works.

Great indeed will be the difference then between those who rejoice to confess him as a Saviour in whom they have trusted, and those who are forced, in that late hour, to acknowledge, *Truly this was the Son of God*, whom while on earth we neglected and despised. This is He, who for us and our salvation, came down from heaven. This is he, who warned us with the voice of authority, and we refused to hear: who invited us with the voice of mercy, but we made excuse. Alas! we “knew not the time of our visitation!” Then shall they “say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.”⁴

But it need not be thus with any, to whom the tidings of salvation are made known. “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the

⁴ Rev. vi. 16.

Lord God." The sacrifice which we are contemplating, is the proof of this. Acknowledge Him who offered it, here, as your Redeemer and your Lord, in order that hereafter he may acknowledge you as heirs of eternal life. When you are raised to meet him "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," be able to say, *Truly this was the Son of God*, who redeemed us, and reconciled us to God by his blood. It was he who purchased for us a kingdom of everlasting blessedness : it was he who blotted out our transgressions, and "put a new heart and a right spirit within us," that we might "walk worthy of the vocation with which we were called," and live as his "peculiar people," "redeemed from iniquity," and "zealous of good works." "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

LECTURE LXXII.

THE BURIAL OF CHRIST.

MATT. xxvii. 57—66.

57. *When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple :*

58. *He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.*

59. *And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,*

60. *And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.*

61. *And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.*

The affection of these faithful women could not be extinguished, but was inflamed by all which they had seen. But it is still more gratifying to learn that at a time when all seemed hopeless, a zealous individual remained who was not ashamed to own himself one of the disciples of Jesus. It is easy to act a faithful part when favour accompanies piety, or when we are surrounded by those who, being lovers of religion themselves, honour it in others. But the real friends of religion are they who defend it when it is made the object of scorn, or who avow its principles when others despise or neglect them. Like Joseph, who *went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.* He was a rich man,

and therefore had a reputation to maintain : yet he did not scruple to show this interest for one who had been crucified as a deceiver, and whose followers were the objects of suspicion. This was to “confess Christ before men.” And God, who knew what was in his heart, made him the honoured instrument of fulfilling the prophecy which had foretold that Jesus should “be with the rich in his death.”¹ How unlikely did it appear, a few moments before, that one thus despised and scorned, whose disciples had all forsaken him and fled, should now be acknowledged by a person of influence and credit, and placed in a rich man’s *own new tomb* !

62. *Now the next day,² that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,*

63. *Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.*

64. *Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead : so the last error shall be worse than the first.*

65. *Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch : go your way, make it as sure as ye can.*

66. *So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.*

Thus in the wisdom of God, we find the Jews themselves contriving the means, by which the fact

¹ Isa. liii. 9.

² Namely, on the Saturday, or Sabbath : the morrow after the crucifixion, which took place on the Friday, *the day of preparation* for the sabbath, which was in this year “a high day,” as falling in with the feast of the passover.

of the resurrection should be cleared from all doubt or suspicion. *They went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.* But they vainly hoped to confine within the barriers of a tomb the body of him who had “life in himself,” and “quickeneth whom he will.” “It was not possible that he should be holden” of death, though he might consent to undergo its pains. And they made it clear, by their own vain precaution, that he did indeed, according to his promise, build up again the temple which they had destroyed, “the temple of his body,” and on the third day raise it from the grave.

Indeed, throughout the whole history, we are reminded, by the conduct of the Jews, of the just image of the prophet, who compares the sons of Israel, vainly contending against the will of God, to the wild animal held captive in the net which has been laid for him.³ They struggle to prevail: but every effort only entangles them the more. They are impelled by their own bad passions: but they are compassed in by the secret power of God, beyond which they cannot move.

Here the chief priests examine Jesus, and accuse him under every disadvantage, even suborning witnesses: and the end is, that the judge himself declares him a “just man.” They revile and scorn him, and mock his royal title: and so they prove his connexion with the prophecies which had gone out concerning him. Contrary to law, they condemn him to death; and, contrary to custom, that death is crucifixion. It accomplishes the

³ See Isaiah li. 20.

“determinate counsel of God” for the salvation of mankind. They allege that God, in whom he trusted, has deserted him: God attests, by supernatural signs, the interest which he is taking in the whole transaction. They set a watch over the sepulchre which contains his body; and so contribute to prove the fact of the resurrection, and seal the truth of his words.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” Let our hearts be led not to oppose that wisdom, but to be instructed by it: and to profit by the judgments, which others, by disobedience and unbelief, have drawn down upon themselves.

LECTURE LXXIII.

THE RESURRECTION.

MATT. xxviii. 1—20.

(Mark xvi.. Luke xxiv. John xx.)

1. *In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary¹ to see the sepulchre. .*

2. *And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the*

The mother of James and Joses.—See ch. xxvii. 56.

angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3. *His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow :*

4. *And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.*

5. *And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye : for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.*

6. *He is not here : for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.*

7. *And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead ; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see him : lo, I have told you.*

8. *And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy ; and did run to bring his disciples word.*

9. *And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.*

10. *Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid : go tell my brethren, that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.*

The conduct of the disciples, at the time of our Lord's death, appears to us very extraordinary. Instead of seeing in that event the fulfilment of all that he had foretold, they considered it as the destruction of their own hopes. They were too much dismayed at his death, to expect his resurrection. The faithful women, *Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary who came to see the sepulchre*, did not look to find it empty, but brought sweet spices with them that they might anoint the body.² "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead." They had prophecies which might have

² Mark xvi. 1.

explained this. But these prophecies were still as “a light shining in a dark place.” The Holy Spirit had not opened “the eyes of their understanding,” that they should perceive the meaning of the prophecies, and apply them to the mystery of redemption. And they could not bring themselves to believe, that one whom they had seen to “give up the ghost,” and whose body they had deposited in the tomb, should rise again in “his own body.” His power, indeed, they had witnessed; but not understanding why he died, they had no hope that as he did not employ his power to save himself from death, he would employ it to raise himself from the grave. He did, however, so employ it. “He died unto sin once;” and “death has no more dominion over him.” Neither shall it have any dominion over his disciples. They indeed, as he did, must pay the penalty which sin incurred; they must suffer what sin has brought on all men; but as Christ rose, they too shall rise; and as he lives, they shall live also. Only remember, that those who are to rise with Christ to everlasting glory, must rise with him here first, from “the death of sin to the life of righteousness.” In this sense St. Paul expects that Christians be already risen. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”³

11. *Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch*

³ Col. iii. 1—3.

came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

12. *And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers,*

13. *Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.*

14. *And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.*

15. *So they took the money, and did as they were taught : and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.*

As it was needful for the enemies of Christ to account for his other miracles, so it was also needful for them to explain away the miracle of his resurrection. This they found easy means of doing. Others would not be quick to believe what was so little expected, as hardly to be believed by his disciples. And this additional falsehood would not lie heavy on the consciences of those who had plunged so deep in falsehood already. The heart is soon "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

16. *Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.*

17. *And when they saw him, they worshipped him : but some doubted.⁴*

18. *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*

19. *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost :*

20. *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have*

⁴ Some doubted, not of the apostles, but of the five hundred brethren, who, as we learn from St. Paul, (1 Cor. xv.) were now assembled.

commanded you : and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

All things had been accomplished, which were to prepare for the establishment of the kingdom of Christ : his ministry, his death, his resurrection. Now the fruits were to appear ; and he commissions his apostles that they go out and gather them. He had laboured, and he sends them to enter into his labours. *All power, he says, is given unto me in heaven and in earth :* power to send the Holy Spirit ; power to convert the hearts of those who hear the word ; power to assign to every man his place throughout eternity ; power to bestow “the crown of righteousness,” on those who “by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality.” *Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations ; make disciples of them :⁵ baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* Instruct them, that there is one God and Father of all ; and that “he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Instruct them, that there is “one Mediator between God and man :” He is “the way, the truth, and the life ;” “no man cometh unto the Father but by him.” Instruct them, that the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, will purify the hearts of all who come to God through Christ Jesus, and will enable them to “live righteously, soberly, and godly,” as becometh those who are looking for a heavenly kingdom. In the name of this TRIUNE GOD baptize them : that they may be

⁵ Μαθητεύσατε is the word rendered by *teach*.

THE
GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK.

LECTURE LXXIV.

MARK, the writer of this gospel, was not, like John and Matthew, an apostle, or an eye-witness of the history of our Lord. Christian authors, who lived near his time, acquaint us that he wrote under the direction of St. Peter: and Peter mentions Mark, and calls him "his son,"¹ probably in the same sense as St. Paul speaks of Timothy as "his own son in the faith," because through his teaching he had been brought to believe in Christ. The name Mark also occurs in the Acts of the Apostles as the surname of John, who was much engaged with Paul and Barnabas in the work of the ministry. Whether this was the same person as the evangelist, is uncertain. Neither need we know more, than that this, like all scripture, "was written by the inspiration of God," and is part of that which he has seen fit to leave for the instruction and edification of his church. May it prove to us what He has intended it to be; and help to make us "wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Christ Jesus!"

¹ 1 Pet. v. 13.

MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.—BAPTISM OF
JESUS.—TESTIMONY FROM HEAVEN, THAT
HE WAS THE SON OF GOD.

MARK i. 1—11.

(Matt. iii. 1—16. Luke iii. 1—23.)

1. *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God ;*

2. *As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*

3. *The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.¹*

4. *John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*

5. *And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.*

The beginning of the gospel revelation was the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning John the Baptist, who went through the wilderness, the desert parts of Judea, calling upon men to consider their ways and repent, that they might be forgiven. As an emblem of the cleansing from sin which they needed and received, he baptized them with water.

Thus he *prepared the way before Christ*. The way is prepared for him, that is, the heart is disposed to receive him, when men are brought to perceive their sinfulness, to perceive that they need one who shall reconcile them to God, and enable them to serve him. And such was the effect of John's preaching upon those persons. They con-

¹ Mal. iii. 1 ; Isaiah xl. 3.

fessed their sins. Yet they were not heathens. The people whom he addressed, were Jews by birth and education, in covenant with God, and possessing the Scriptures. But it seems they had lived very unsuitably to those privileges; and now that they were led by a faithful teacher to reflect, they found much to repent of, and *confessed their sins.*

It is not, therefore, always enough, that a knowledge of God should exist in a land, for this existed in Judea; nor is it enough to possess the Scripture, for these possessed the Scripture; nor is it enough to be made the people of God by covenant, for these had been dedicated to him in circumcision, as Christians are by baptism; yet these, when faithfully dealt with, had a new life to begin.

This is still often the case with those who have always had the Scriptures within their reach, and enjoyed the means of grace; they have not applied the word of God to their hearts, or seen “the truth as it is in Jesus,” or lived according to their baptismal vows. It often pleases God, by a ministry more earnest or more energetic than they had before been used to, to bring these to a better mind; they *confess their sins, repent*, and not merely by nominal profession, but by real faith, *believe the gospel.*

Every Christian, therefore, should be led to inquire, how far it may be with him, as it was with the Jewish nation at the time of our Lord’s coming. He must not expect a John the Baptist to awaken him. He has “Moses and the prophets;” he has the Scriptures of truth; “let him hear them;” let him frame his heart and life according to them.

6. *And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins ; and he did eat locusts and wild honey ;*

7. *And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.³*

8. *I indeed have baptized you with water ; but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.*

Thus John fulfilled the course assigned him, by preparing the way for the ministry of Jesus. John showed them their need of change ; he showed them the sinfulness of their lives, and called them to “ the baptism of repentance ; ” but One who was to come after him, whose messenger he was, could alone renew their hearts by the purifying influence of the Holy Ghost, and enable them to live as those who have been “ called to holiness,” and are looking forward to a heavenly kingdom.

9. *And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.*

10. *And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him.*

11. *And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

It may be said here, as was said on another occasion, This *voice from heaven* came not for Christ's sake, but for our sakes. It was the solemn testimony of God to the person and character of Christ. It directed those who heard it to the Saviour who

³ Who is higher above me, than a master above the lowest of his servants.

was come to bless them, and to the salvation which God had prepared for them. *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

Now the need of our constantly studying Scripture, is that our minds may be brought into conformity with the mind of God. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; for they are foolishness unto him.”⁴ But we, we Christians, are not of nature, but of grace ; we are not to retain the sentiments of the natural man : and let us ask ourselves, how far our mind has been brought to agree with the mind of God, who is *well pleased with his beloved Son*. “What think we of Christ?” Do we feel that his gospel,—the atonement it reveals, the covenant it offers, the promises of grace which it conveys,—afford us exactly that comfort which our hearts are in need of, and our condition requires ?

This it will do, in proportion as we understand the holiness of God, the weakness of our own hearts, and the solemnity of the judgment which is to come. We find ourselves stained with the guilt of sin ; but “the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.” We are not sufficient of ourselves to do any thing as of ourselves ; but he has engaged to “work in us both to will and to do.” We are justly condemned as transgressors against the divine law ; but “there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” We are “born in sin, and children of wrath ;”⁵ but he is revealed to us under the title of SAVIOUR. And we receive him as such. We receive him as the author and finisher of our

⁴ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

⁵ Catechism.

faith ; we look to him as the guide and helper of our course ; and we welcome him, as “made unto us by God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Thus we are enabled to join the sacred hymn, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and the Father : unto him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”⁶

LECTURE LXXV.

THE TEMPTATION.—CERTAIN APOSTLES CALLED —POWER OF CHRIST OVER EVIL SPIRITS.

MARK i. 12—28.

(Matt. iv. 1—11. Luke iv. 1—13.)

12. *And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness.*

13. *And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan ; and was with the wild beasts ; and the angels ministered unto him.*

It was ordained that our Lord should undergo the temptation of Satan : and now that the proper season was arrived, *the Spirit driveth him*, vehemently urges him into the wilderness, where it was to take place. *His* nature impelled him to do his heavenly Father's will. *Our* sinful nature

⁶ Rev. i. 5.

contends against that will. The spot was a desert, infested with wild beasts. He was not, however, left alone in this desert: *angels ministered unto him*. So, though his disciples have a wilderness to pass through, which exposes them to many enemies of their faith and piety, they are not left alone. Elijah was not left alone, when he fled from the violence of Jezebel. “As he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, an angel touched him, and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee.”¹ St. Paul was not left alone, in what was to him a wilderness, in the court of judgment, where he was accused before Cæsar. He has recorded his testimony; “The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.”² In the same way all the true servants of God may depend on finding, that the time of their trial, if it comes on them whilst they are in the way of duty, will also be the time when they will experience the divine support, and experience it most abundantly.

(Matt. iv. 17—22. Luke v. 1—11.)

14. *Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,*

15. *And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

16. *Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.*

17. *And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.*

This, though a casual expression, taken from the circumstances in which Jesus found Simon and

¹ 1 Kings xix. 5, &c.

² 2 Tim. iv. 17.

Andrew, yet aptly describes the nature of the employment which he intended for them. When they afterwards went out into the world, and preached what their Master was now preaching, *repent and believe the gospel*: “repent, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins: they cast as it were their nets into the sea, that they might take those who “were ordained unto eternal life.” Sometimes their own success astonished them. As when the same Simon addressed his countrymen on the day of Pentecost, and “they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”³ And sometimes “they toiled all night, and took nothing.” As when on the preaching of Paul thirty years afterwards, at Jerusalem, the Jews, who heard him, “cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, and lifted up their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.”⁴ When “the Lord opens the heart”⁵ of those who hear, the success is great and sure. His Spirit attended his words on this occasion. Simon and Andrew were moved by them.

18. *And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.*

19. *And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets.*

20. *And straightway he called them: and they left their*

³ Acts ii. 41.

⁴ Acts xxii. 22, 23.

⁵ See Acts xvi. 14.

father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

21. *And they went into Capernaum ; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.*

22. *And they were astonished at his doctrine : for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.*

(Luke iv. 33—37.)

23. *And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit ; and he cried out,*

24. *Saying, Let us alone, what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth ? art thou come to destroy us ? I know thee who thou art, the holy One of God.*

Scripture tells us thus much of the world of spirits : that there are angels interested in the salvation of man, and others in his ruin. Some rejoice in the repentance of a sinner : and “ desire to look into the things ” concerning his redemption. These, on the other hand, are grieved at the appearance of our Lord. They express a consciousness of our Lord’s power, and of the design with which he came into the world. As in Matt. viii. 29, they exclaim, “ What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God ? art thou come hither to torment us before the time ? ” So here the *unclean spirit* cried out, saying, *Art thou come to destroy us ? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.*

He was indeed come to destroy them. “ For this was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” And the power which he exercised over these evil spirits, was the first indication of that great purpose of his coming.

25. *And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.*

26. *And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.*

27. *And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.*

28. *And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.*

This then must be our comfort, when we reflect upon a subject so awful and mysterious as the power of the evil spirit in the world. The same Scripture which reveals the extent of that power to us, also reveals to us one who came to break and subdue it. There is the power of Satan; there is the power of those who belong to his company: but there is one greater than these, more ready to bless than they to injure, more able to save than they to destroy. *With authority commandeth he the unclean spirits, and they obey him.* All those who have united themselves to him, and by a true and living faith have entrusted themselves to his care, may read without alarm what in this and other parts of Scripture is related of the power of evil spirits. “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” For “greater is He that is with us, than he that is in the world.” Only let us remember, that as there is one adversary, Satan, the author of sin; so there is one preserver, he who came to “save his people from their sins.” Those who witnessed his power, and were also sensible of the misery which it would relieve, took advantage of

it; “they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.” We, our children, and our families, have already been brought unto him. By baptism we were enrolled among his people. Let us remain with him, “not faithless, but believing,” to be healed of present sin, and to be delivered from future danger. “Save, Lord, or we perish.”

LECTURE LXXVI.

MANY SICK PERSONS HEALED.—A LEPER RECEIVES A CURE.

MARK. i. 29—45.

(Matt. viii. 14—23. Luke iv. 38—44.)

29. *And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.*

30. *But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her.*

31. *And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.*

Gladly would this woman minister to him, who had restored her health, and to those who had *told*

him of her. So it will be the desire and purpose of all who enjoy spiritual life through the gospel, to serve the author and giver of that inestimable blessing. They may still do so. They serve him, when they obey him. They serve him most acceptably, when they minister to the comforts of those who are dear to him. And those are dear to him, who follow his precepts. For whosoever "shall do the will of God, the same is his brother, and sister, and mother."

32. *And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.*

33. *And all the city was gathered together at the door.*

34. *And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils ; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.¹*

35. *And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.*

36. *And Simon and they that were with him followed after him.*

37. *And when they had found him, they said unto him All men seek for thee.*

38. *And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also : for therefore came I forth.*

39. *And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.*

(Matt. viii. 2—4. Luke v. 12—15.)

40. *And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

¹ It was not his purpose now to be proclaimed at all, otherwise than by his work^s (see v. 43, 44 :) still less to be proclaimed by evil spirits.

41. *And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will : be thou clean.*

42. *And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.*

There is sufficient analogy between bodily and spiritual diseases, to render one an example of the other. It is a reason, perhaps, why many of the miracles which Jesus wrought are described with much minuteness and particularity of circumstances, that we may be led to pay attention to this analogy.

The leper, here spoken of, had heard or witnessed many wonderful and merciful cures. His own case weighed upon his mind. And irremediable as it was by the hand of man, it might be relieved by the power of Christ. So he came with much earnestness and humility and faith, *beseeking him, and kneeling down to him, and saying to him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

Thus far his case is similar to that of many a suppliant of Christ's mercy, who feels the misery of sinful habits or sinful inclinations, and equally feels the impossibility of subduing them by any power of his own. It is true, there is this great difference: the leper could not be unconscious of his state, or of its wretchedness; while many are unconscious of theirs, who labour under the disease of sin. But I suppose the case of one who is not unconscious: of one who falls under the apostle's description, "I find a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to

the law of sin that is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?”²

This person, like the leper, may be led to apply to Christ Jesus in the prayer of faith, with a confidence like his, founded on the promises of Scripture, *If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

The prayer of the leper was immediately and evidently answered: *Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.*

The diseases of the soul seldom receive such immediate cure. We cannot doubt, whether He, who *was moved with compassion* by a bodily disorder, which could not last long, and could not affect eternity, beholds with compassion the spiritual trials of his disciples. Yet their leprosy does not often *immediately depart from them.* Commonly, faith and patience are proved by the protracted existence of evil desires and passions. They remain, like the enemies of the Israelites, as “thorns in the side” of the Christian: partly because corruption is so deeply seated in him, and partly that he may know his own weakness, and be brought to more entire dependence upon his Saviour. The “thorn” in St. Paul’s side, of whatever nature, he did not immediately remove. He did not say, even in the case of the chief apostle, *I will; be thou free from trial; but he said, “my grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness.”* And the same grace will be found sufficient for all who seek it without reserve, and rely on it without

² Rom. vii. 21, &c.

wavering. He willeth the salvation of every man, much more of those who are labouring “to work out” theirs, against the lusts of the flesh, and the enmity of Satan. Surely he, who spared not his own self, will, with himself, also freely give us all things. Greater good-will hath none than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Such considerations as these may justly confirm our faith and animate our prayers, and keep us stedfast unto the end, “striving against sin.”

43. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away ;

44. And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man : but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.³

45. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places : and they came to him from every quarter.

That a crowd might not be inconveniently collected, our Lord saw fit to prohibit this man from publishing his cure. He was to show himself to the priest, whose office it was by the law to pronounce a leper clean ; to take off, as it were, the law under which, as leprous, he remained. This was to be *a testimony unto them*, that a great prophet was come into the world ; yes, and more than a prophet, as they might perceive if their hearts were not hardened.

³ See “the law of leprosy,” Levit. xiv.

The man, however, was too full of joy and gratitude to conceal the matter. He so *blazed it abroad*, that Jesus was forced to quit the city, and seek less frequented places.

A similar zeal and gratitude will be felt by every sincere disciple of Christ Jesus. It will manifest itself in various ways; certainly not in making boast of spiritual blessings; for "let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." But there will exist an earnest desire and endeavour that others should apply to the same fountain of spiritual health, of which they themselves have drunk and been refreshed. Christians "are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people;" for this very purpose, that they "should show forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light."⁴

Do not disappoint the excellent design: but "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

⁴ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

LECTURE LXXVII.

A PARALYTIC MAN HEALED.—THE POWER OF CHRIST TO FORGIVE SINS; AND HIS REASON FOR CONVERSING WITH SINNERS.

MARK ii. 1—17.

(Matt. ix. 2—9. Luke v. 18—28.)

1. *And again he entered into Capernaum, after some days ; and it was noised that he was in the house.*

2. *And straightway many were gathered together, inso-much that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door : and he preached the word unto them.*

3. *And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.*

4. *And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was : and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.*

5. *When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.*

The lowness of the houses in Judea, and their flat roofs, (often alluded to in Scripture,) made it possible to admit the paralytic man in the way described. Still there was difficulty, trouble, and expense. So that it is said, *when Jesus saw their faith*. Before they took such pains, they must have been very confident that it was worth while ; and that he, whose presence they sought so anxiously, could make them a return. To believe this, and

to act upon it, in surrendering the heart to Christ Jesus, is the faith required of a Christian. Doubtless it is pleasing to him when men are not restrained by the difficulties which sometimes oppose them. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Jesus sees the faith of those who resolve to follow him, notwithstanding inconvenience, or scorn, or worldly loss; and the reward is like that which was given to the sick of the palsy, *Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.*

We have no reason to suppose that this man's infirmity was the consequence of some particular sin, any more than that "those upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, were sinners above the rest of the Galileans." Our Lord, therefore, used this expression, *Thy sins be forgiven thee*, to draw their attention to the origin of all evil,—“by sin came death;”—and also to awaken their minds to the purpose of his coming into the world. "For whether was easier to say, *Thy sins be forgiven thee*; or to say, *Arise, and walk?*"

It produced the effect which might be expected.

6. *But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,*

7. *Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?*

8. *And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?*

9. *Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?*

10. *But that ye may know, that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy)*

11. *I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.*

12. *And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all ; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.*

The scribes, therefore, and other bystanders, are not censured for inquiring, *Who can forgive sins but God only?* It would have been well, if men had never usurped this power to themselves, or if others had not credulously conceded it to them. But the design of Jesus was to awaken their attention to the fact, that *the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins*. If he could say to the paralytic man, *Arise and walk*, God must be with him, and therefore God was equally with him when he said, *Thy sins be forgiven thee*. So ought they to have reasoned among themselves, and to have come to him, not only for the relief of their bodily infirmities, but for eternal life. It does not appear that they did so. They *were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion*. This was a natural impulse, the effect of the miracle which they had seen, and cost them little. To admire the power of God, and even to acknowledge his goodness, is a very different thing from repentance or obedience. Our business is to *glorify God*, and show forth his praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives.

13. *And he went forth again by the sea side ; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.*

14. *And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.*

15. *And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his*

house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples : for there were many, and they followed him.

16. *And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners ?*

17. *When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick : I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

Levi, or Matthew, was a publican. Such an influence attended the words which *Jesus said unto him, Follow me*, that immediately *he arose and followed him*. Afterwards Jesus was in the house of his new disciple, and many publicans and sinners sat at meat with him. The scribes and Pharisees, being ignorant of his motives, thought this strange in a preacher of righteousness. “Behold a gluttonous man, a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners !” This drew forth a reply which explains his design in coming into the world. *He came to call sinners to repentance*. He came as a physician, to heal those that were sick. And therefore to blame him for conversing with sinners, was like blaming a physician for entering a hospital. If men *are whole, they have no need of a physician*. And if the world had not been lost in sin, it would have stood in no need of a Saviour. “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

We must not, therefore, suppose that this sentence makes a distinction between the righteous, as if they needed no repentance, no redemption, and the sinner who needs both. But we must interpret it, as declaring the purpose for which Christ Jesus

came into the world. Because “the Scripture has concluded all under sin;” and except for Him, their “sin remaineth” upon all. None are righteous, but those whom he has brought into the way of righteousness. All must be called to repentance, except those who have already repented, and committed themselves to him who is our “advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins.”

LECTURE LXXVIII.

REASONS FOR THE DISCIPLES NOT KEEPING
FASTS.
INSTITUTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SABBATH.

MARK ii. 18—28.

(M att. ix. 14—17. Luke v. 33—39.)

18. *And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not.*

19. *And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.*

20. *But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.*

21. *No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.*

22. *And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled; and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.*

As the Pharisees expected that the teacher of righteousness should keep apart from publicans and sinners; so they also expected that his disciples would be punctual in all those practices, to which they had attached an idea of sanctity. John was "a man of God:" "all counted him for a prophet." And his disciples observed days of fasting. The Pharisees fasted "twice in the week." Why did the disciples of Jesus fast not?

For this there were good reasons. Fasting was a part of mourning. And the time of mourning was not yet come. The religion was new: that of the Pharisees was old, and ready to vanish away.

His disciples were weak in faith: and no more fit to support the severity of self-denial, than *old bottles* to bear the fermentation of *new wine*.¹

(Matt. xii. 1—8. Luke vi. 1—6.)

23. *And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.*²

¹ These verses are more fully treated in Matt. ix.

² See on Matt. xii. 1—4.

24. *And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?*

25. *And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him?*

26. *How he went into the house of God, in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?*³

27. *And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:*

28. *Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.*

Our Lord takes this occasion to show incidentally, the important and merciful design of the sabbath. *The sabbath was made for man.*

The first chapter of the Bible acquaints us, how God having in six days created this our world, and man to live in it, “blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it.” He exempted it from the ordinary business of life, and separated it for sacred purposes.

Had Adam remained innocent, he would not have been without labour. “The Lord God put him in the garden of Eden, to dress it and to keep it.” Therefore he would have required a sabbath. But this is immaterial. God foresaw that he would

³ It appears from the account in Samuel, (1. xxii. 29,) that Abiathar was not actually high priest when this occurrence took place, but Abimelech, who was slain in consequence, by the vengeance of Saul. His son, Abiathar, immediately succeeded him, and continuing priest forty years, became a more prominent person in the Jewish annals than Abimelech, and (probably) is on that account named here.

not remain innocent. In a very short space the sentence was pronounced, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground."⁴

But this needful labour "for the meat that perisheth," was not to prevent his labouring for that which perisheth not, but endureth unto everlasting life. The sabbath was appointed, that the soul might have its care, as well as the body: that a connexion might be maintained between time and eternity, between man and God, between earth and heaven.

The short account of things in the book of Genesis does not acquaint us how long, or in what manner, the sabbath was observed by the patriarchs, or how soon the greater part of the inhabitants of the world lost this, as well as all other traces of their relation to God. But we find the sabbath spoken of in the book of Exodus,⁵ in a way which shows that it was known or remembered by the Israelites. "Six days ye shall gather" the manna, "but on the seventh day, *which is the sabbath*, there shall be none." Afterwards, when the law was issued, the purpose of the appointment is more fully declared.⁶ "Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: *but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God.*

The reasons given for the appointment of the sabbath apply to all mankind, and not to the Jews

⁴ Gen. iii. 17.

⁵ Ch. xvi. 26.

⁶ Deut. v. 12.

alone. “It is the sabbath of the Lord thy God. For in six days God made heaven and earth, and rested the seventh day ; therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it.” The regard, also, which God, by the mouth of his prophets, expresses for those who call the sabbath a delight, holy of the Lord, honourable ; and his censure of those who pollute his sabbaths, apply to all equally who possess his revelation : not only to the Israelite, but to “the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord to serve him.”⁷

Therefore the sabbath is not a part of the Jewish law, which was done away. It does not belong to the ceremonial, but to the moral law,⁸ from which “one jot, or one tittle shall in no wise pass, till all be fulfilled.” It existed before the Jewish law. And it was solemnly recognized by our Lord himself, with the other three laws of the first table, which he summed up under one head, as “the first and great commandment.”

Indeed we may boldly say, that if the gospel had annulled the obligation of the sabbath day, mankind in general could not have profited by the gospel. To the greater part of them it would have been as a dead letter. What could they have known or learnt of it, if the command had been, *Every day* shalt thou labour.

Certainly the Christian will so far remember every day to keep it holy, that he will “set God before him” in his work as well as in his meditation : he will perform his duty, as “unto the Lord,

⁷ See Isaiah lvi. 6.

⁸ See its enactment, Deut. v. as well as Exod. xx.

and not to man." But this is not natural to us. It must be wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit. And this cannot be, unless there is a time for employing the various means with which the Spirit works; time for thought, for self-examination, for the Scriptures, for devotion. If the sabbath were taken from the week, this world, unless it were created anew, could never become a preparation for another. Eternity, even now, is with difficulty kept in view. Without the sabbath, men would be not only almost, but altogether, engrossed in the perishing things of this world. We cannot doubt of this, for we know how it is with those, who do not remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.

Here, then, a great truth is declared, which we must take particularly to ourselves. *The sabbath was made for man.* It is the gift of God to man. He speaks of it as such. "*I gave thee my sabbaths.*" And experience proves its value. Its value, both to the body and the soul. But this, like other gifts of God, if not used for the welfare of man, will become his condemnation. Seven years out of every fifty years are sabbaths. Therefore the most laborious man, who has lived fifty years, has had seven years in which to become "wise unto salvation." Where, then, is the plea of ignorance, which is too often urged on earth; but which, at the day of judgment, will not be heard?

The second clause of the sentence, that *man was not made for the sabbath*, agrees with the first in showing its real and merciful design. Those things may be done on the sabbath, which necessity, or

reasonable convenience, requires. Those things are not to be done, which interfere with the main purpose of the day. Exact rules can hardly be laid down. Neither will they be wanted, if the heart be right with God. The heart which is right with God, will not consent to be deprived of its best comforts, its chief delight : it will not consent to be always careful and troubled about many things, when one thing is needful : neither will it consent that others should be, except by their own fault and choice. And the reward will be according to the promise, increasing “delight in the Lord :” growth “in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ :” better preparation for that “rest which remaineth for the people of God.”

LECTURE LXXIX.

A MAN WITH A WITHERED HAND IS CURED ON THE SABBATH.—JESUS WITHDRAWS FROM THE MULTITUDE.—CHOOSES HIS APOSTLES.

MARK iii. 1—19.

(Matt. xii. 9—16. Luke. vi. 6—11.)

1. *And he entered again into the synagogue ; and there was a man there which had a withered hand.*

Is. lvi. 7.

2. *And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day ; that they might accuse him.*

The spirit of the people here was such, that our Lord was grieved for the hardness of their hearts. *They watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day ; that they might accuse him.* Now had there been an honest doubt on the minds of these persons, he would have resolved it. And they might reasonably have entertained this scruple, remembering the record of former times. "While the children of Israel were in the wilderness," the man who "had despised the word of the Lord, and broken his commandment," having been "found gathering sticks on the sabbath day," was put to death. "All the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died."¹ There might justly have been a question concerning the observance of the sabbath, while this example remained upon their history. And the Son of man, who hath declared himself "Lord of the sabbath," was competent to answer such an inquiry.

But these were not their thoughts. They watched him that they might find an accusation against him. Therefore, he teaches them the use of the sabbath by example.

3. *And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth.*

4. *And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil ? to save life, or to kill ? But they held their peace.*

¹ See Numb. xv. 31—36.

5. *And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out : and his hand was restored whole as the other.*

This was a spiritual illustration of the truth, that “the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.” Otherwise he must have borne the extremity of hunger, rather than “pluck the ears of corn :” he must have lingered under the misfortune of “a withered hand,” instead of receiving a cure. But such was not the intent of the sabbath. It “was made for man :” for his bodily comfort and spiritual health. Therefore, his bodily comfort is to be considered, as well as his spiritual advantage. It is lawful so to attend to the one as not to injure the other.

A practical question might occur with us, to which the example given in this passage would apply. A pious man might doubt, how far it were right to employ a part of the sabbath in works of mercy or usefulness, which would interfere with private devotion. In *teaching*, for example. The spirit of our Lord’s words might satisfy him. He points out the sufferer ; and says, *Stand forth*. And then asks, *Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil ? to save life, or to kill ?*

Now the majority of our people, if they are not instructed on the sabbath days, will not be at all instructed. It must be with them as with the Jews, of whom the prophet complains, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Those, therefore, who deny themselves the rest of the sabbath, that they may employ a part of it upon the instruc-

tion of the young or the ignorant, are following the example of their Saviour. They are *saving life*. And this is an act of "mercy" which God prefers to "sacrifice."

The hearts of the Pharisees were too much hardened by prejudice and bigotry to understand this.

6. *And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.*

7. *But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judea,*

8. *And from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and from beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him.*

9. *And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him.*

10. *For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues.*

11. *And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God.*

12. *And he straitly charged them that they should not make him known.*

We saw before (ch. i. 23) how "the unclean spirit cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? I know thee who thou art, the holy One of God." And afterwards (v. 34) we are told that "he suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him." They acknowledged his sovereignty, and were obedient to his power. And one reason why *he charged them that they should not make him known*, appears to have been his desire to avoid the

tumult which would have arisen, if any should attempt to “take him by force, and make him a king.”² “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet Esaias, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.”³

(Matt. x. 2—4. Luke vi. 12—16.)

13. *And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him.*

14. *And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach,*

15. *And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils.*

16. *And Simon he surnamed Peter;*

17. *And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder:*

18. *And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alpheus, and Thaddeus, and Simon the Canaanite,*

19. *And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house.*

It was a needful part of the great design on which our Lord came, that he should ordain a certain number *who might be with him, and whom he might send forth to preach*. He was, himself, to prove his divine power, to correct prevailing errors, to “bring life and immortality to light;” and when

² See John vi. 15.

³ See Matt. xii. 17, &c. where the prophecy is introduced to explain the fact of his “charging them that they should not make him known.”

all this was fulfilled, to effect the work of redemption, and make propitiation for sin. And then the gospel was to be proclaimed to all nations, "beginning at Jerusalem." Such was the design ; and the instruments must be prepared who should put this in execution ; by short experiments, while he remained on earth, and afterwards by devoting themselves to the apostleship. For this purpose *he ordained twelve*, who heard the attestation of his divinity ; who " beheld his glory ;"⁴ and who related to others that " which they had heard, which they had seen with their eyes, which they had looked upon, and their hands had handled, of the word of life."

These twelve, here, are called. The commission was given afterwards. *He called whom he would* : so that they had not chosen him, but he had chosen them. He chose, we may be sure, those who were fittest for his purpose ; not selecting the men of education or the men of influence, because their own insufficiency was to be supplied by the Holy Spirit, and because it was designed to show that the agency which established the gospel was the agency of God and not of man.

The authority with which he endued them, to *heal sicknesses and to cast out devils*, was an emblem of the service in which ministers of the gospel were hereafter to be employed ; whose office it is to heal the diseases of the soul, and to reclaim men "from the power of Satan unto God." And happy is it, when these remember the greatness of their dignity, the importance of their trust ; when

⁴ 1 Pet. i. 17 ; 1 John i. 1—3.

they imitate the zeal of Peter, the energy of the two sons of Zebedee, the constancy of James, and the readiness of all, when they left their several occupations, and obeyed the call which summoned them.

LECTURE LXXX.

MIRACLES OF JESUS ASCRIBED TO BEELZEBUB. ENCOURAGEMENT OF THOSE WHO DO THE WILL OF GOD.

MARK iii. 20—35.

(Matt. xii. 22—50. Luke xi. 14—26.)

20. *And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.*

21. *And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.*

22. *And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.*

23. *And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?*

24. *And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.*

25. *And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.*

26. *And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.*

27. *No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.*

In this condescending manner does our Lord refute the inventions by which his divinity was assailed. The scribes came down into the country where he was at present sojourning, and gave the explanation of his miracles which had been adopted at Jerusalem. *He hath Beelzebub on his side, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.* What, says the Lord, shall the author of evil bring the remedy of evil? Shall the kingdom of Satan subvert itself? Satan is like a powerful king: he has his captives in hold, and whoever would rescue them from his dominion, must first subdue and bind him, and then he may *enter his house and spoil his goods*. If, therefore, I do this, if I deliver men from the unclean spirits which enthrall them, ye may be assured that I have an authority independent of that which they obey, and superior to it. And ye have an indisputable proof that “the kingdom of God is come upon you.”

Then follow the consequences of *blaspheming against the Holy Ghost*, by ascribing his works to Satan. It brings the *offenders in danger of eternal damnation*. Because it excludes them from the only refuge by which eternal damnation can be avoided. They must cease to revile the Holy Ghost, before they can be benefited by the Holy Ghost. Whereas they assert, that the Spirit which was with Christ, and by which he wrought, was *an unclean spirit*.

28. *Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme:*

29. *But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost*

hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation :

30. *Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.*

(Luke viii. 19—21.)

31. *There came then his brethren and his mother, and standing without, sent unto him, calling him.*

32. *And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee.*

33. *And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren ?*

34. *And he looked round on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren !*

35. *For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.*

Many reasons might induce the mother and brethren of our Lord to dissuade him from the course he was pursuing. It appeared before, that they said, *He is beside himself*. They knew not the purpose for which he came into the world, and they perceived that he was incurring the enmity of the chief priests and elders. They “wist not that he must be about his Father’s business.” But he would not “give place to them, no not for an hour.” He was doing the will of God. And he is led, by the occasion, to pronounce a solemn blessing on all who live with a like design. *For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.*

It is strange that this should be so uncommon. We might imagine that it would be the purpose of all, in their respective stations and circumstances, to *do the will* of Him who made them. We might suppose that all, at least, to whom He is revealed,

must set this object before themselves. But experience shows the contrary. Few consider, in their ordinary habits, or in the business of their lives, what is *the will of God*, instead of considering the prospect of worldly advantage, the inclinations of their own hearts, or the practice of others.

Great, however, is the encouragement which these words convey. *Jesus looked round on those which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!* Now those who sat about him were those who had been convinced by his miracles, and were learning truth from his doctrines. In this they were *doing the will of God*. Compared with the rest of their countrymen, they were in the condition of those who now make the gospel not only the religion which they profess, but the rule which they follow; who “hear the word of God, and keep it.” And these are exposed to various trials, and have many difficulties in their way.

Here, then, is their consolation. The Saviour of the world, the Son of God, has a tender concern for them; looks upon them in the light of the nearest relationship: and will assist their weakness and confirm their strength, with the regard of a son and the affection of a brother. With this assurance, how confidently may they depend upon him, and address him in their prayers! And what a dignity is thus attached to them! Whether that dignity be acknowledged by their fellow-men or not,—it commonly is, for consistent adherence to the will of God commands respect,—whatever be their condition here, they are united in close alliance with Him who is “God over all, blessed for ever.”

A time, however, will arrive, hereafter, when the value of this alliance will be more universally recognized. Who that looks forward to the reality of a judgment to come, will not desire that in that day Christ Jesus should acknowledge them as his own?—should say of them, *Behold my mother and my brethren!* But we cannot assume such relationship then, merely because we shall then need it. We must establish our title to it now: And that title is, that we *do the will of God*. No other claim will avail, not even such as might seem most clear and undeniable. And this is the will of God, “that we believe on him whom he hath sent.”¹

LECTURE LXXXI.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

MARK iv. 1—20.

1. *And he began again to teach by the sea side : and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea ; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.*

2. *And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,*

3. *Hearken ; Behold, there went out a sower to sow :*

¹ See John vi. 29.

4. *And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.*

5. *And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:*

6. *But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.*

7. *And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.*

8. *And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.*

9. *And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

10. *And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.*

11. *And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables:*

12. *That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.*

God is here represented as acting in the way which our sense of fitness and justice recommend in ordinary life. *Unto them that are without* (to the great body of the Jewish nation) *all these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive, and hearing they may hear, and not understand.* This people, in general, had shown itself insensible to all those means which God had employed to convert and enlighten them. He had instructed them, but they had not learnt: he had warned them, but they had not

listened : he had stricken them, but they had not repented : he had blessed them, but they made him no return. Therefore, as a father discards the son, whom after repeated trials he finds incorrigible ; or as a benefactor withholds his hand, when former kindness has been abused, and gifts improvidently squandered : so did God see fit to withhold his grace from those, on whom it had been so long bestowed in vain.

Such is the force of that awful declaration of Isaiah, to which our Lord alludes, as having its accomplishment here. (vi. 9.) “ And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not ; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes : lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert, and be healed.” It is not for such that the infinite blessing is designed, of faith and repentance here, and hereafter, everlasting glory.

13. *And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable ? and how then will ye know all parables ?*

14. *The sower soweth the word.*

15. *And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown ; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.*

Some hearts are no more prepared to receive *the word which the sower soweth*, than *the way side*, the common pathway, beaten and hardened by every passenger, is fit to receive seed. What

is dropped there, lies bare and exposed, till the fowls of the air devour it. So the hearts of this class have no softness, no tenderness, to admit beneath the surface the truths which fall upon them. You talk to them of their sinfulness; they plead the example of their neighbours. You tell them of God's threatenings; they still hope that they shall fare as well as others. You explain to them the mercy of Christ, but they treat it as a plea for sin, rather than a motive for righteousness. Thus the declarations of Scripture find no way of admission; whatever they hear, whatsoever is taught them, is neglected or despised: *Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts*, lest they should believe, and be saved.

16. *And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;*

17. *And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.*

This second class is of a less hardened stamp. They do not despise, and reject at once, the truths of which they are warned; but at first receive the word with joy. The truths of the gospel are too well suited to the nature of fallen men, not to be eagerly caught at by those who are not altogether abandoned. Therefore there are many, who when they hear the word, *immediately receive it with gladness*; and if there were no trials to come, no sins to be renounced, no new heart to be acquired,

they would be something more than “almost Christians.” So corn might flourish *on stony ground*, if there were no sun to parch it, or no storms to wash it away: it springs up for a time, and then withers for lack of moisture. Such is the faith of these barren hearers; it flourishes, till temptation arrives; till some bad habit is to be renounced, some good habit acquired, some self-denial exercised: and then its want of root is visible.

18. *And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,*

19. *And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.*

Seed which falls among thorns is more likely to take root and flourish for a while, than either that which is dropped by the way side, or that which is sown on stony ground. But it is no more likely to succeed in the end; to ripen and perfect its fruit. So the effect of the cares, the business, the pleasures of the world, is not seen immediately: and is the more dangerous, because it is more deceitful. Open transgressions of the divine law alarm the conscience. A worldly spirit creeps in unawares, like briars among corn, or clokes itself under the plea of the necessities of a family, or the exigencies of old age: till men come, perhaps, like the sister of Lazarus, to imagine that they are discharging a duty, when they are neglecting the “one thing needful.”¹

If this be so: if seed may be scattered around us, yet never reach the heart: if it may enter the

¹ Luke x. 40.

surface, yet take no root : if it may even take root, and afterwards be choked and overgrown, and therefore barren : what need is there for all to examine themselves, whether they be in the faith, to prove their own selves ! What need of watchfulness, when an enemy is always watchful : what need of prayer, when the flesh is so weak : what need of comparing our course of life and thought with Scripture, when “the heart is deceitful above all things !”

For that enemy may be overcome ; the flesh may be subdued to the spirit : and the deceitful heart may become the honest and good heart, which brings fruit to perfection.

20. And these are they which are sown on good ground ; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirty fold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

This description of the ground which is really *good*, convicts multitudes, who, when they cannot defend their practice, boast of their sincere hearts. Scripture allows but one proof of a good heart, that it *receives the word, and brings forth fruit* : such fruit as is not natural to the human heart, but springs from “the engrafted word ;” “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith, temperance.”

May “these things be in us, and abound :” and show “that we be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ !”

LECTURE LXXXII.

THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL TO BE DIFFUSED BY THE APOSTLES.

THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL COMPARED TO THE GROWTH OF GRAIN.

MARK iv. 21—29.

21. *And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not to be set on a candlestick ?*

22. *For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested ; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad.*

23. *If any man have ears to ear, let him hear.*

24. *And he saith unto them, Take heed what ye hear : with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you : and unto you that hear shall more be given.*

25. *For he that hath, to him shall be given : and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.*

Christ here intimates to his disciples, how those things which were now spoken in parables, should hereafter be duly explained : and what was now taught in secret, should hereafter come abroad. He was “ come, the light of the world.” And as a man does not light a candle to hide it *under a bushel, or under a bed*, so neither did God send his Son, except that he might be *manifested* and believed on in the world. And that, through their means : so that they must *take heed to what they heard*. They were stewards ; and “ it is required of stewards

that they be found faithful." They should be dealt with according to their faithfulness. *With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you.* According as they measured out with fidelity the truths imparted to them, more should be given. For such is the will of God. He takes the talent from the slothful, and gives it to the diligent. "The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God."¹

This leads to a representation of the growth of the kingdom of God, of which the apostles should be the first instruments.

26. *And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground ;*

27. *And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.*

28. *For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself ; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.*

29. *But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.*

This parable explains how the gospel should grow secretly and make its gradual way, both in the world at large, and in the hearts of individuals. *So is the kingdom of God as if a man should cast seed into the ground.* Our Lord himself was now the man whom he represents as doing this : he was eradicating the errors of the Jewish people, and sowing eternal truth in their stead : he was declaring the real nature of God's heavenly kingdom, and revealing the way which leads to it : he was opening to mankind the secrets of their own corrupt hearts,

¹ Heb. vi. 7.

and the renewing change which they required; he was explaining what is, and what is not, “true and undefiled religion.” And his seed was to lie long in the ground. It was to remain in the memories of those who received it, till called forth by the command of the Holy Spirit; and disclosed by a gradual developement, “to the Jew first, and afterward to the Gentile.” It was to be transmitted slowly, and by degrees, from city to town, and from town to village: from province to province, from country to country. And thus would spring up *first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear*. First, the number of the names together would be about an hundred and twenty. Not long after would be added unto them about three thousand souls. By degrees the word of the Lord would increase, and the number of the disciples multiply in Jerusalem greatly, both of men and women, and “a great company of the priests would be obedient to the faith.” Then the gift of the Holy Ghost would be poured out upon the Gentiles also: multitudes would so “learn Christ” as to turn from their idolatrous “vanities to serve the living God;” to “be renewed in the spirit of their minds;” and to “put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

All this, and much more, was foreseen by our blessed Lord when he uttered this parable. He knew that the seed which he came to sow, *should spring and grow up, man knoweth not how*. *

And what Christ, the chief husbandman, was then doing in person, has been carried on since, and

is constantly carrying on, by those who believe his word. The sowers who *cast the seed* are of various orders. They are the ministers, to whom a field is entrusted that they should dress and keep it; they are the parents, whose duty is to imbue the infant mind with the Scriptures from its youth; they are the masters of families, who, like faithful Abraham, “command their household that they keep the way of the Lord;” they are the missionaries, who cause the heathen to hear, “every man in his own tongue, the wonderful works of God;” they are the zealous Christians, who, in whatever station or circumstances, use their means and opportunities to drop the fructifying word into the ground of the human heart.

And these act like the husbandman who casts his seed into the furrow. He knows that it will lie there through a long and dreary period, before it springs up and repays his labour. Still, in the appointment of Providence, he may expect *first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear*.

So is it with the Christian, who, in whatever circumstances, may cast the gospel seed. To the minister, it may seem to be thrown away upon hopeless ignorance. The parent may discover no depth of earth to receive it. With the master, it may appear choked among the cares of the world, and the desire of other things. In other cases, it is trampled under foot, or devoured by the fowls of the air.

Yet it may happen, under the most unpromising appearances, that while men *sleep and rise, night*

and day the seed shall spring up, and *the earth bring forth fruit*. First appears a seriousness unknown before, a sense of the value of the soul, an apprehension of eternity. Then a movement of the heart towards him, who invites all *who have ears to hear*: and at last, a true scriptural faith, attended by “works meet for repentance;” proving, that though man *knows not how* the growth takes place, the Spirit has wrought it. For “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”

And then, *when the fruit is brought forth*, the husbandman *putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come*. If we speak of an individual Christian, at the season when he sees fit, the heavenly husbandman will take him to his rest. And also when the fulness of time arrives, he will *put in his sickle*, and reap the great harvest of the world. “The Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him,” and “gather the wheat into his garner.”

How much then depends on this—whether the seed does *spring, and grow up, and bring forth fruit*! The same husbandman “will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them.” Let all remember, it is no matter of indifference, no matter of mere curiosity, no matter of worldly interest: it is matter of life or death,—eternal life, eternal death,—whether there are signs of the *blade, or the ear, or the full corn in the ear*.

Lord, send a gracious rain upon thine inheritance, and refresh it when it is weary!

LECTURE LXXXIII.

THE GOSPEL COMPARED TO A SEED GROWING
 INTO A TREE.
 A STORM IS QUIETED AT THE COMMAND OF
 JESUS.

MARK iv. 30—41.

(Matt. xiii. 31—34.)

30. *And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?*

31. *It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:*

32. *But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.*

33. *And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.*

34. *But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.*

Time has expounded this last parable in a most striking manner. Who that saw a grain of seed, even if it were not *less than all other seeds*, would believe that the branching shrub or lofty tree should spring from it? And who that saw our Lord, born of an obscure family, in an obscure province, traversing the country of Judea with a few obscure disciples, would have believed that the doctrine he was teaching should supersede all other doctrines, *growing up, and shooting out great branches*, and furnishing a shelter for all the nations

of the earth, where their ignorance might be instructed, their fears comforted, their penitence received? “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.”

(Matt. viii. 18—27. Luke viii. 22—25.)

35. *And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.*

36. *And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.*

37. *And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.*

38. *And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow : and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish ?*

39. *And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*

40. *And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful ? how is it that ye have no faith ?*

41. *And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him ?*

We may turn this history to our own use, if we consider, first, who were the company in this short voyage.

Embarked in this little ship, were Jesus and his disciples. Jesus, the Son of God, who had come to bless the world, by reconciling it to God : and his disciples, who received him as the promised Saviour, and believed that “he had the words of eternal life.” Their case, then, ought to be ours also. For he has called us, as he called them, to follow him, to enter into his service, to put ourselves into

his hands, to be guided by him "into the way of peace." And those who have listened to his call, are passing through the world, as these disciples were crossing the sea in company with God their Saviour.

But they have not yet entered into their rest. It is not a sea without storms. *There arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship.*

Here, too, is life, every-day life. The Christian is not secure from difficulties, and dangers, and sorrows. Christ himself was tossed with winds and waves: and so must his disciples be, both from within and from without, even whilst they have him with them, and are sailing by his direction.

Whilst this tempest was raging, Jesus was asleep. *And they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?*

In this there is something to blame, and much to approve. There is this to blame, that they show some signs of murmuring, because he had suffered them to fall into such peril; some signs of doubting, whether he could or would deliver them. Yet is not this a picture of ourselves? How feeble is faith, when pressed with heavy trials! How apt are secret complaints and repinings against God to mingle with our supplications! As if our Redeemer, had he really loved us, ought to have preserved us from falling into those troubles. *Master, carest thou not that we perish?*

At the same time there is this to approve in the disciples, that they knew at once to whom to apply in the hour of trial.

Over those who do thus commit themselves to

him, and are found with him in the way of duty, he is ever watchful. True, as man, *he was asleep* : for he had taken upon him the weakness of our nature. But as God, he is ever waking: “he that keepeth his people, neither slumbers nor sleeps;” and not one of his little ones shall ever perish, through want of his protection or failure of his care. This was soon seen, when at the call of his disciples *he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.* As it happens sometimes in life, when prayer has a gracious answer, and sorrow is turned into joy, or troublesome opposition ceases, or some apprehended danger is unexpectedly removed.

Having thus assured them of their safety, he gently reproves the alarm of his disciples. *Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?* As much as to say, Have ye not seen enough of my kindness and enough of my power, to believe that you must be safe when you are in my hands? They had witnessed many of his miracles; they had heard his gracious promises; they knew the services which they were chosen for, and destined to perform; yet, in the hurry of the present danger, all these thoughts vanished from their minds: as too often, when the hour of temptation arrives, *we forget everything we have heard, and everything we have believed, and everything we have determined.* And well might the Lord say, *Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have so little faith?* Has it not been promised, “Fear ye not, for I am with you;” “My grace is sufficient for

thee ;” “ My strength is made perfect in weakness ;”
“ As your day is, so shall your strength be ?”

Christians have learnt to expect this, by the recorded experience of their brethren. It was new to those who witnessed it; *and they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him.*

They might well be struck with awe and wonder, who knew not *what manner of man* he was. But *we* cannot wonder, to whom it is revealed, that by Him God made the worlds, and “without Him was not anything made that was made.” It is really no wonder that the thing created should yield to the power of its creator: that he who “fixed the bounds of the sea by a perpetual decree,” should say, “Hitherto shalt thou come and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.”

Our chief lesson is, however, that Christ may be trusted to deliver us both from outward and from internal enemies. Outward difficulties, which seem to threaten our course, are often turned aside when we meet them in the strength of the Lord. And so are the far worse and more dangerous hindrances which arise from our own bad passions. *Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith!* There is one to deliver us from the “body of death” within, from “the law of sin which is in our members.” Commit yourselves to Him, “who is able to save to the uttermost.” Seek of him strength against the sins that most easily beset you. He shall *rebuke the winds and the waves*, and there shall be *a great calm*: and *men shall marvel and say, What manner*

of religion is this, that the most stubborn passions, and the most rebellious lusts *obey* it? Even the disciple shall be a marvel to himself: that passions which had tossed him all his life, and against which he had vainly struggled, have been calmed and made to cease by the word of the Son of God.

LECTURE LXXXIV.

THE UNCLEAN SPIRITS CAST INTO THE HERD OF SWINE.

MARK v. 1—20.

(Matt. viii. 28—34. Luke viii. 26—37)

1. *And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.*

2. *And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,¹*

3. *Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:*

4. *Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chuins had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.*

¹ Matthew speaks of *two*. Probably the one here described was more generally known.

5. *And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.*

6. *But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,*

7. *And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.*

8. *For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.*

9. *And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.*

10. *And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.*

We have here the description of a man in a lamentable state of insanity, dangerous to himself, and dangerous to others. And this state, which we should otherwise have referred to natural causes producing disturbance of the brain, we are here taught to ascribe to an unclean, or evil spirit. This spirit, like that mentioned in chap. i. 24, recognizes the Lord Jesus, and *cried with a loud voice, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.*

It is indeed a fearful question, *What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God?* This unclean spirit was not one of those beings whom Jesus came "to seek and to save." He is aware of this, and says, *What have I to do with thee?*

That which was the deep calamity of the evil spirit, is a calamity which need belong to none of the race of mankind to whom the way of salvation is made known. But it is a state in which some

wilfully place themselves. By their careless indifference to the gospel, or by their open hostility to its commands, they seem to say, *What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?* By stifling in the birth the suggestions of conscience, by closing the avenues at which truth might enter, by rejecting the occasional warnings which they hear, they almost seem to say, *I adjure thee that thou torment me not.* Suffer me to pass through the short interval which remains, in ignorance and apathy.

It was thus that our Lord complained and lamented over the Jews his countrymen, “Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.”

Jesus seizes the occasion, to show that he was Lord of those evil spirits which are the enemies of mankind.

11. *Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.*

12. *And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.*

13. *And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine : and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand ;) and were choked in the sea.*

14. *And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done.*

15. *And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind : and they were afraid.*

16. *And they that saw it told them how it befel to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine.*

17. *And they began to pray him to depart out of their coast.*

18. *And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with ~~the~~^{is} devil prayed him that he might be with him.*

19. *Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*

20. *And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him : and all men did marvel.*

The account here given, furnishes a striking illustration of the consequences which were to follow the coming of our Lord.*

First, the apostle tells us that he must reign, "till he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power," that shall dare to exalt itself against him. "He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." The end, therefore, of the swine into which the devils entered, is an emblem of that destiny which awaits all hardened and unrepenting sinners, who "are led captive by Satan at his will:" is an emblem of that "final destruction from the presence of the Lord" for which the evil spirits themselves are reserved "in chains under darkness unto the great day."

It is a warning therefore to all, that they "harden not their hearts." "Now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation."

Secondly, the change produced in the man who is relieved from this dominion of the unclean spirit, represents the case of the penitent, when delivered

* 1 Cor. xv. 24.

from the dominion of Satan by the influence of the Holy Ghost.

The abandoned sinner, who has thrown off the allegiance which he owed to his Creator, and spurns the commandments which are intended to govern him, may be compared to the wretched creature of whom it is here said, that *he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces ; neither could any man tame him.*

When such an one is reclaimed by the Holy Spirit acting through the word of the gospel, and convincing him “of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment,” the change is like that in the miracle before us. *They come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed of the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind.* He no longer lives in a manner unsuited to a reasonable being, and ranges through haunts which threaten his destruction : but he is found sitting at the feet of him by whom he has been “delivered from the power of darkness ;”³ he is clothed with that “righteousness which is upon all them that believe :” he is *in his right mind*. He was not in his right mind, when he lived “without God in the world :” when he lived as the brute beast “which has no understanding :” when he lived as if he had no immortal soul. He is in his right mind, when “the spirit of his mind is renewed,” and he begins to live as “a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.” And

³ See Col. i. 13.

so is the prophecy fulfilled, "Thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and will save thy children."⁴

We must observe, further, the conduct of the man that had been possessed with a devil. *He prayed Jesus that he might be with him. Howbeit, Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*

Those who enjoy the blessing of "peace with God through Jesus Christ," will *be with him*, not indeed in presence, but in spirit, in the exercise of prayer, and in the habit of obedience; and they will *publish the great things done for them*: that is, by their instruction, their advice, and their example, they will recommend to all around them the same faith which is the source of their own comfort, and the guide of their own lives.

⁴ Isaiah xlix. 25.

LECTURE LXXXV.

THE FAITH OF A WOMAN, WHO HAD LONG SUFFERED UNDER DISEASE, REWARDED BY A CURE.
THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS RESTORED TO LIFE.

MARK v. 21—43.

(Matt. 18—26. Luke viii. 41—50.)

21. *And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him : and he was nigh unto the sea.*

22. *And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name ; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet,*

23. *And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death : I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed ; and she shall live.*

24. *And Jesus went with him ; and much people followed him, and thronged him.*

25. *And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years,*

26. *And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse,*

27. *When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment.*

28. *For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.*

This is one of the miracles which sets before us the power of faith, and is therefore profitable, not

only for the conviction of those who saw it, but for the instruction and example of us for whom it is recorded.

The woman had heard concerning Jesus, of the mercy which he had shown, and the power which he possessed : she had so strong a persuasion of it as to say, *If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.*

A like persuasion must prevail in all who seek the benefit of his atonement. "He that cometh to God, must first believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." He that cometh to Christ, must first believe that he is the Son of God, and that "his blood cleanseth from all sin." Therefore he says to Jairus, (v. 36,) "be not afraid ; only believe." And in another case ; "If thou canst believe ; all things are possible to him that believeth."¹

Together with this faith in his saving power, there must be the same personal application of it to ourselves. His "virtue,"² the virtue of his sacrifice, is not affected, whether it is sought or no ; but we must ask, that we may receive ; we must seek, that we may find the benefit. His power to heal would have equally remained ; but this woman would not have profited by it, unless she had pressed through the crowd, and touched the border of his garment, saying to herself, *If I do but touch his clothes, I shall be whole.*

Her conduct, then, is an example of that faith which claims for itself the blessing covenanted to us in baptism, applies the promises of the gospel,

¹ Mark ix. 23. ² Luke vi. 19. Then went virtue out of him.

and seeks for remission of sin and acceptance with God through Christ the Saviour of the world. And what follows is the proof of its reward. This poor woman received an immediate cure.

29. *And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.*

30. *And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?*

31. *And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?*

32. *And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing.*

33. *But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.*

34. *And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.*

There were many who crowded upon our Lord. But he at once distinguished the application which had been made in faith. He said, "Somebody hath touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me."³

In the same manner he distinguishes between those who bear his name, or profess his faith, but go no further than a name or a profession; and those who really feel their own wants, and understand his power, and exercise the privilege to which they are entitled, and seek deliverance by the virtue of his propitiation. To the eye of man there may

³ So St. Luke relates it.

often be as little difference, as there was to the eye of the disciples between the multitude and this woman. They are baptized alike ; they worship in the same church ; they attend the same memorial of his death. But he discerns a difference, because he discerns the heart. He “knows his sheep,” as he is known by them. He knows those who are really penitent, really humble before God, really desirous of living “righteously, soberly, and godly,” really looking for the “blessed hope” of his second “glorious appearing.” And such may take the comfort of the words, *Thy faith hath made thee whole ; go in peace.*

There is indeed a difference. This woman was immediately sensible of the mercy granted her. *She felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.* But the Christian has not always the same confidence, that he has received pardon of his sins. It may be better for him not to enjoy such assurance. That inward peace is the gift of the Holy Spirit ; and, like other blessings, it may be wisely and mercifully withheld from many who are objects of their Redeemer’s tenderest care. They are, however, not less secure when fearing, than when rejoicing. He knows their faith, though he may keep them uncertain of their pardon. Groundless fear, in such a case, is far preferable to groundless security. And as it often happens in nature, that a day of cloud and rain ends in a bright gleam of sunshine,—so, likewise, in the dispensations of grace, it sometimes pleases God that the soul which has lingered long in gloom and in heaviness, shall receive light at the conclusion

of its earthly course ; and when about to fall asleep, is enabled to go in peace, and feel in itself that it has been healed of its plague.

35. *While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead : why troublest thou the Master any further ?*

36. *As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.⁴*

37. *And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James.⁵*

38. *And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly.*

39. *And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep ? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*

40. *And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying.*

41. *And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi ;⁶ which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise.*

42. *And straightway the damsel arose, and walked ; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment.*

43. *And he charged them straitly, that no man should know it ; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.*

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⁴ Believe, or rely on my power to save, and it shall be employed in your favour.

⁵ As at his Transfiguration, Mark ix. 2 ; and his agony in the garden, Mark xiv. 33.

⁶ Two Syriac words, the language of the country.

Though on this, and two other remarkable occasions, Jesus revived the lifeless body, it was not in this manner that his power was to be habitually shown : but in healing the infirmities of the living. Such, perhaps, might be the reason why *he charged them straitly that no man should know it*. Enough was done to prove his power over death : the dead were raised. But he would not excite that expectation generally.

We may be reminded, from this consideration, that life is the time when we are to expect and seek those blessings which Christ offers. Let the living, the living serve thee, O God ! There is no repentance for them who are gone down into the grave.

LECTURE LXXXVI.

UNBELIEF AT NAZARETH.—APOSTLES SENT FORTH.—DANGER OF NEGLECTING THEM.

MARK vi. 1—13.

(Matt. xiii. 44—58.)

1. *And he went out from thence, and came into his own country ; ¹ and his disciples follow him.*

2. *And when the sabbath-day was come, he began to teach*

¹ Nazareth.

in the synagogue : and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things ? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands ?

3. *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon ? and are not his sisters here with us ? And they were offended at him.*

4. *But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.*

5. *And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.*

6. *And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.*

It was natural that those who had known Jesus as the son of Joseph and Mary, and who were acquainted with the circumstances of his family and household, *should be astonished, and say, From whence hath this man these things ?* So far it was not strange that the prophet should be received with the least honour in his own country.

But what ought to have been their course ? Not to be *offended at him* ; not to be indignant and cavil, because, being *the carpenter's son, the son of Mary*, wisdom was given him, and he did mighty works : but to inquire, how being apparently so born and circumstanced, he possessed this power and wisdom. They should have “ tried the spirit whether it were of God.”

There is much in the doctrines of the gospel, which at first may seem as strange as what offended the people of Nazareth. “ Without controversy, great is the mystery,” that the Son of God should be made flesh, and should suffer the death of the

cross. Many are offended at it; and *he can do no mighty work in them, because of their unbelief.*

To whom then shall they go? He, and he alone, "has the words of eternal life."

Rather let them inquire, *From whence hath this man these things? And what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?* If the gospel were not from God, whence was it? If Jesus were not the Son of God, who was he? How was he able to lay hands upon the sick folk and heal them, to silence the scribes and Pharisees, to astonish all who heard "the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth?"

Even Jesus, who knew the perverseness of the heart, *marvelled because of the unbelief* which prevailed. Hereafter, when it is too late, many will marvel at themselves, that they suffered the obstinacy of pride and prejudice to shut against them the opportunity of salvation. *He can do no mighty work in them*, whilst they continue in unbelief. This is a moral impossibility. Faith must bring them to him, or he cannot save. The Spirit is poured from above; the believing heart is as a vessel open to receive it: but unbelief acts as a cover to the heart, lest it should admit what is ready to be poured in.² As the Lord said unto Jeremiah, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind *could not be toward this people!*"³

May He, who has the hearts of all men in his

² Augustine.

³ Jer. xv. 1.

hand, see fit to open ours ; that we may behold the wondrous things of his law,⁴ and be not faithless, but believing.

(Matt. x. 1—15. Luke ix. 1—12.)

7. *And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two ; and gave them power over unclean spirits ;*

8. *And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only ; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse :*

9. *But be shod with sandals ; and not put on two coats.*

10. *And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place.*

11. *And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet, for a testimony against them.⁵ Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city.*

12. *And they went out, and preached that men should repent.*

13. *And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.⁶*

The dismal consequences of that unbelief which was just now noticed, are here set before us in striking terms. *Whosoever shall not receive you, or hear you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for*

⁴ See Ps. cxix. 18.

⁵ See on Matt. x. 14.

⁶ Oil was employed among the Jews as a symbol of plenty and of joy. It is probable that such was the meaning of the apostles *anointing the sick with oil*. They brought relief, they brought gladness and comfort ; and oil was an emblem of this. The custom remained. St. James directs, that “ the elders of the church should pray over the sick, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”—v. 14.

that city. Ignorance, unawakened, unenlightened ignorance, is the destruction of many. But a far more awful destruction awaits the obstinately impenitent; those who close their ears against the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely.

Let us enter into the case. The apostles were sent forth through the country, preaching *that men should repent*, for "the kingdom of heaven was at hand;" appealing to their consciences, that they did not set God before them, that the law and the prophets were neglected or despised. The question would soon arise, why should they believe that God had sent this message to them? But the apostles wrought works which no man could do except God were with him. *They cast out many devils, and healed many that were sick.* By these credentials they proved their claim to be heard.

Now if, after these warnings and testimonies, men persisted in their obstinate impenitence, they were in the state of those who "sin wilfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth." Their case became far more heinous in the sight of God. Great wickedness prevailed in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha, and "sudden destruction came upon them unawares," a signal proof of the divine anger. Yet to Sodom and Gomorrha no such warning had been given, as was now given to the inhabitants of Judea. Sodom and Gomorrha would have no less to answer for at the day of judgment, than those who should now refuse to receive and hear the messengers of Christ.

How little is this considered in the world! How little do men regard the responsibility which be-

longs to those who are surrounded by the light of the gospel? To close their eyes against that light, to reject the warnings and instructions which are multiplied upon them, is exactly the case contemplated in this passage. *Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet, for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city.* For then shall be realized the words of Wisdom, (Prov. i. 24,) “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hands, and no man regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind: when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer: they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.”

But whoso hearkeneth unto truth “shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.”

LECTURE LXXXVII.

HEROD CONSENTS TO THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.—JESUS PITIES THE UNINSTRUCTED PEOPLE.

MARK vi. 14—34.

(Matt. xiv. 1—13. Luke iii. 19.)

14. *And king¹ Herod heard of him ; (for his name was spread abroad :) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.*

15. *Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets.*

16. *But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded : he is risen from the dead.*

17. *For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife : for he had married her.*

18. *For John had said unto Herod. It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.*

19. *Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him ; but she could not :*

20. *For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him ; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.*

Very observable is this account of Herod. A strong conviction must have rested upon his mind of John's divine authority, when on hearing of the

¹ Herod was called by the title of king, as governor of Galilee.

miracles of Jesus, his first impression was, *It is John, he is risen from the dead.* Yet this conviction had led to no effective repentance. Herod had *feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.* He heard John gladly: but he heard without obeying: what he heard, made no change in his mode of life. He did many things; but he did not the one thing which it was his first duty to have done; he did not “cease to do evil:” he did not put away Herodias. Therefore his sin remained. Nay, its heinousness was much increased by the conviction which he had felt, and the warning which he had received. No divine grace rested on him: and “the latter end of that man became worse than the first.”

The case is far more common than might be supposed. Multitudes have the sort of belief in Christ, which Herod had in the authority of John. They do many things which they would not do, if Christianity were not established in the land: perhaps they have no doubt of its truth: perhaps they hear the preacher gladly. But the heart still remains unsubdued; unsubdued, though not unconvinced: no effectual faith attaches them to Christ: no surrender is made of the soul to God: they are not brought to “cleanse their hands,” or “purify their hearts” from sin. And what is the end? When any temptation closely presses, and the matter comes to a decided trial, then it is evident that Satan is still holding possession; still reigning dominant. Or even, if the commission

of heinous wickedness, as in the case of Herod, does not render this plainly manifest in the sight of man, the heart is known to God, and he sees that whatever stings may pierce and pain the conscience, the will is still alienated from Him. Either death comes upon them, and finds them unconverted, and therefore unprepared; or their sins, like those of Herod, increase in heinousness, and “go before them unto judgment.”

Therefore, “if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away” from thee; and “let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles:”² whilst that is allowed a lodgment, there must be a separation between thee and God.

21. *And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee;*

22. *And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee.*

23. *And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom.*

24. *And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist.*

25. *And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist.*

26. *And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him he would not reject her.*

27. *And immediately the king sent an executioner, and*

² Job xi. 14.

commanded his head to be brought : and he went and beheaded him in the prison,

28. *And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel : and the damsel gave it to her mother.*

29. *And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb.*

This act appears as the completion of Herod's wickedness, the finishing stroke to his bad character. And the history acquaints us with one point on which it turned. *For his oath's sake, and for the sake of those that sat at meat with him, he would not reject* the demand, but consented to a deed at which his conscience revolted, and which made him *exceeding sorry*. A wavering, undecided heart is always swayed by the fear of man. He dared not say, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" It would have been the first step towards a new life : but a step which he had not the faith or the grace to take.

And very many are prevented, through a similar fear of man, from entering upon a course of obedience or repentance. They are kept short of that complete surrender of themselves, which is required by the words, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." They are kept short of that earnest endeavour after heaven, which is "seeking first the kingdom of God." They are kept short of that decided line, that determined walking with God, to which all the promises of Scripture are confined. They "halt between two opinions," and try to "serve God and Mammon." It is a course which may not end as Herod's ended : but it must equally end in "everlasting destruction

from the presence of the Lord." For it is written, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

30. *And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught.*

31. *And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile : for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure, so much as to eat.*

32. *And they departed into a desert place by a ship privately.*

33. *And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him.*

34. *And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd : and he began to teach them many things.*

Yet there were those in Judea, whose business it was to lead and tend the flock.

So remarkably were the words of Ezekiel verified : "Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds, The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost : but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered because there is no shepherd : and they became meat to all the beasts of

the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

“Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David: he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.”³

Yes, “he shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”⁴ For he is “the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”

Only let it be seen, that we answer the description of his flock. “They hear his voice, and he knows them, and they follow him.”⁵

³ Ezek. lxxiv. 4, &c. ⁴ Isa. xl 11. ⁵ John x. 11, 27.

LECTURE LXXXVIII.

FIVE THOUSAND FED IN THE WILDERNESS. JESUS CALMS THE FEARS OF HIS DISCIPLES. MANY SICK PERSONS HEALED.

MARK vi. 35—56.

(Matt xiv. 15—21. Luke ix. 12—18. John vi. 5—14.)

35. *And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed :*

36. *Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread : for they have nothing to eat.*

37. *He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat ?*

38. *He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye ? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes.*

39. *And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.*

40. *And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.*

41. *And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them ; and the two fishes divided he among them all.*

42. *And they did all eat, and were filled.*

43. *And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes.*

44. *And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.*

This miracle is recorded by all the Evangelists, with the intention, surely, that we should derive encouragement and comfort from it. And we may justly derive comfort : for as Jesus showed so much consideration for the temporary and bodily wants of those around him, how certain may we feel that he will supply the spiritual need of all who follow him ! He has “ ascended up on high, and received gifts for men,” that he may give them “ grace for grace,” and fill them with his fulness, and “ pour out his spirit upon them.”¹

(Matt. xvi. 22—36. John vi. 15—21.)

45. *And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people.*

46. *And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.*

47. *And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land.*

48. *And he saw them toiling in rowing ; for the wind was contrary unto them : and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.* *

49. *But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out :*

50. *For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer : it is I ; be not afraid.*

51. *And he went up unto them into the ship ; and the wind ceased : and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.*

52. *For they considered not the miracle of the loaves : for their heart was hardened.*

¹ Ps. lxxviii. 18. Compare Eph. iv. 18.

This passage of history may afford an useful subject of reflection.

Observe, first, the groundless alarm of the disciples. *When they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out : for they all saw him and were troubled.* Quickly, however, he made himself known to them ; gently reproving them while he calmed their fears, which implied a doubt of his protection. *Immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer : it is I ; be not afraid. And he went up unto them into the ship, and the wind ceased.*

This assurance, *It is I, be not afraid*, is the abiding comfort of the sincere Christian ; of those who, like the apostles, have followed the Redeemer and devoted themselves to him. Faith places them under his protecting care, and nothing can befall them in which he is not concerned.

They are not free from the troubles and the trials of life ; they suffer them like other men ; *the wind may be contrary*, as to the disciples in this voyage : they may be forced to *toil in rowing* : but they have a security and a comfort peculiar to themselves. Perhaps they are deprived of their dearest friends ; the desire of their eyes is taken from them, and they seem to be left alone in the world. Perhaps they are afflicted with hardships ; poverty weighs them down : or it becomes difficult for them to serve God without offending man, and risking the loss of all their earthly good. Whatever their sorrows are,—and who can reckon up all the sorrows which encompass us in this world of trouble !—their Lord is nigh them though they

perceive him not. He whispers, *It is I, be not afraid.* It is I who have directed this trial, that your faith might be proved; and I too will give you strength to bear it: rely on me; be not afraid.

This comfort makes the anxieties and distresses of a Christian more tolerable, than the ease and prosperity of a man who lives without Christ in the world.

One certain trial awaits us all. In other respects men differ. Some escape the pains of sickness; and some escape the troubles of poverty; and to some God gives the rich enjoyment of domestic comforts. But in this all are equal; that there is one trial which none escape. The hour of death must come upon every individual. A fearful hour; when the soul is about to leave this world, and all that is known and dear to it, and to enter on a strange country; and when illness makes the body weak, and less able to stand up against a man's own fears, and the grief of surrounding friends. A fearful hour; when the present feeling is the feeling of pain and misery; and the next step will lead to the throne of God, when we shall be called to give account of our works, and to "receive according to the things done in the body."

This then is the hour, when every man who has the faculty of thought, must stand in need of comfort. And the Lord Jesus affords that comfort to the sincere Christian. He whispers, *It is I, be not afraid.* You could not be summoned from the world, except as I see fit; your pain, your illness, is a messenger from me; I have witnessed your faith, and heard your earnest prayers; and now I call you

out of this world of trial, to inherit the kingdom prepared for all who trust in me ; that where I am, you may be also.² Be not afraid. It is I who shall preside at the judgment-seat ; God will “ judge the world by that man whom he hath ordained ; ”³ and “ whoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven.”

Such is the support which Christ furnishes to all his faithful servants in the day of their trials. Under his protection sorrow loses its bitterness, and death is disarmed of its sting. Learn daily to make him more and more your friend, by meditating more on what you owe to him ; by dwelling on your sinfulness, till you increase your sense of the value of his mediation ; by desiring to learn his will, and studying to perform it faithfully. Thus draw nigh to him, and he will draw nigh to you.

53. And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore.

54. And when they had come out of the ship, straightway they knew him,

55. And ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was.

56. And whithersoever he entered into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment : and as many as touched him were made whole.

Thus easily is attention drawn to temporal blessings ; thus readily do men avail themselves of present advantages. We need that faith which is “ the evidence of things not seen,” that we may be no

² John xvii. 24.

³ Acts xvii. 31.

less earnest in applying the remedy, which is offered for the diseases of the soul ; that we may pray to him whom “ God sent to bless us,” “ Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” “ Deliver me from guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation ; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”⁴

LECTURE LXXXIX.

THE REPROOF OF THE DISCIPLES BY THE PHARISEES, BECAUSE THEY ATE WITH UNWASHEN HANDS, GIVES OCCASION FOR SHOWING THE DANGER OF SUBSTITUTING THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN FOR THE WORD OF GOD.—THE REAL DEFILEMENT OF THE HEART EXPLAINED.

MARK vii. 1—23.

(Matt. xv. 1—20.)

1. *Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem.*

2. *And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled (that is to say, with unwashen) hands, they found fault.*

3. *For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.*

4. *And when they come from the market, except they wash,*

⁴ Ps. li. 2, 14.

they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables.

5. *Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands ?*

6. *He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*

7. *Howbeit, in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

8. *For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups ; and many other such like things ye do.*

God had given strict command, that nothing should be added to his law. (Deut. xii. 32.) “ Whatsoever thing I command you, observe to do it : thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” And with great reason. Whenever his word is added to, in the end the real commandment is laid aside, and gives place to the addition. So it had been with these purifications and ablutions, which the Pharisees had added to the law. The question is, *Why do ye eat bread with unwashen hands ?* not, *Why do ye not cultivate purity of heart ?*

Thus it has proved with regard to other corruptions. It was once a rule with a great part of the Church, and still is a rule with some Christians, to abstain from meat on certain days. This might seem innocent, nay laudable : it is good to accus-

¹ St. Mark wrote his gospel for circulation in heathen countries ; therefore he explains the Jewish customs to those who were strangers to them. This St. Matthew did not.

tom men to self-denial. The apostle allows, concerning these things, that they “have indeed a *show of wisdom* in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body.”² Soon, however, appears the evil of adding to the divine word. Not to fast on certain days, became an offence no less heinous, than the transgression of a moral duty. Sometimes the pride, and sometimes the interest of men are concerned in exaggerating such offences; till by degrees “the weightier matters of the law” are neglected; *the commandment of God is laid aside; the tradition of men observed.*

Our Lord proceeds to show how this process had actually taken place among the Jews. It was an acknowledged command of God that men should honour their parents. The Pharisees would avow this. But in practice, they made it a graver offence to forego the gift to the treasury, than to deny support to a parent.

9. *And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.*

10. *For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:*

11. *But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban,³ that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free.*

12. *And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother;*

13. *Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.*

² See Col. ii. 23.

A Syriac word: *it is devoted to the treasury.*

The parent, here, demands relief from his son, which the commandment would require him to supply : *for Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother.* The son, however, answers, that what he should otherwise allow to his parent, he had devoted as *corban, that is to say, a gift*, to the treasury. And the scribes pronounce that man free from the obligation of the divine command.

We must observe, that what perverted the judgment in such a case was self-interest. These teachers had a share of what came into the treasury. But so it is that corruption insinuates itself, gradually, and under some specious pretence, whenever the principle is once admitted of *teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

Therefore we are warned against this error. St. Paul reproved it at a very early period : writing to the Colossians, (ii. 22, &c.) “Wherefore are ye subject to ordinances, (touch not, taste not, handle not ; which are all to perish with the using,) *after the commandments and doctrines of men?*” He had also an express revelation, enjoining him to warn the Church against similar errors in later times. (1 Tim. iv. 1, 3.) “The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils : forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God had created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”

We are not ignorant of the sad fulfilment of this prophecy. Useless things, even pernicious things,

have been required as sacred duties. Men have been diverted from truth, and occupied in vanities, till the “power of godliness” has been utterly destroyed.

This, however, is not the danger of our country, or of the present age. Superstitious rites and unauthorized ordinances are not likely to mislead us. But it is still possible to *make the word of God of none effect through our tradition*. There is still a sort of *traditional religion* which prevails, and is very agreeable to the corruption of human nature. There is still a tradition of common opinion, which considers that sufficient for ourselves, which is held sufficient by others, or was thought sufficient by our fathers. Such a tradition, as leaves what are called the *mysteries of religion*, for the learned or the clergy. Such a tradition, as represents the Scripture as a book dangerous for the uneducated. Such a tradition, as makes ignorance an excuse for neglect of God. Such a tradition, as perverts the design of the Eucharist, and makes faith in Christ to consist in receiving the sacrament on a death-bed. *And many such like things* still make the word of God of none effect; and the mistaken notions of men are taught for doctrines.

These, however, and all other errors, proceed from the same source: from ignorance, or neglect of the word itself. Whether in precept or in doctrine, only the constant study of Scripture can keep men up to the standard of Scripture. For this purpose we read it daily; we read it repeatedly: not that we expect to find any new thing, any discoveries as to faith or practice: but that our faith may not

turn to unbelief, or our practice be “conformed to this world.”

“Thou, Lord, hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. Uphold us according to thy word, that we may live.”⁴

We perceive, in what follows, how completely reason and conscience may be blinded by the prevalence of error. The people, nay, even the disciples, could hardly be persuaded that outward purifications were no part of religion. They were quite ignorant that what *defileth a man* is the disobedience of his will to the will of God, the opposition of his nature to the holiness of God.

14. *And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand :*

15. *There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him : but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.*

16. *If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.*

17. *And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable.*

18. *And he saith unto him, Are ye so without understanding also ? Do you not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him ;*

19. *Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats ?*

20. *And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.*

21. *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,*

22. *Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness :*

23. *All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.*

Thus it is, that “that which is born of the flesh, is flesh :” and that “except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

What remains for us, but to join in David’s prayer, “Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me ?” “Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts ; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean ; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”⁵

LECTURE XC.

FAITH OF A GENTILE WOMAN PROVED AND
REWARDED.

THE CURE OF A DEAF AND DUMB MAN AP-
PLAUDED BY THE MULTITUDE.

MARK vii. 24—37.

(Matt. xv. 21—31.)

24. *And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it : but he could not be hid.*

⁵ Ps. li. 6—10.

25. *For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet :*

26. *The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation;¹ and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.*

27. *But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled : for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.*

28. *And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord : yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs.*

29. *And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way ; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.*

30. *And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon a bed.*

This conclusion explains to us the purpose which our Lord kept in view, whilst for a time he repelled the prayer of this poor woman. What he said, "he said to prove her ; for he himself knew what he would do." He drew from her an exhibition of the faith and humility which he saw within her heart. It was not because the reply had been unexpected, that *he said unto her, For this saying go thy way ;* but that he might recommend her conduct to all who should read her story : and also that he might show us, by example, the purpose of those trials by which faith is often exercised.

¹ A foreigner, a Gentile, speaking the Greek language, and, as appears from St. Matthew, inhabiting a district which retained the name of Canaan.

² This is more fully explained by St. Matthew, where our Lord reminds his disciples, that the message was sent "to the Jew first, and afterwards to the Gentile." I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Doubtless there is a reason for them which we cannot always perceive. The apostles could not divine the reason why this woman was for a time repulsed, and not treated with the same ready favour which was granted to other suppliants. The account in St. Matthew tells us that "they came and besought him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us." But he was leading her, the while, "by a way which she knew not:" he was leading her by a way which should strengthen her own faith by exercising it, and hereafter display a lesson to others.

May not this explain to us other instances of the dealings of God with his people? The case of Abraham, for example. His faith was put to an extraordinary test, when he was commanded to sacrifice his "son, his only son, Isaac, whom he loved." "It came to pass that God did tempt" (did try and prove) Abraham. Yet God was perfectly aware what was in Abraham's heart, and "needed not that any should tell him." He knew with what resignation he would obey his will.³ Yet he chose that Abraham should actually exhibit it, and become an example to the Church, of that faith which "against hope believes in hope,"⁴ because it trusts him to whom "all things are possible."

The case of Job is of a like nature. God knew the heart of Job, as well as that of Abraham. When we read his history, we are disposed to wonder at the dispensation which was assigned him, as the refusal which this distressed and humble

³ Gen. xxii. 1.

⁴ Rom. iv. 18.

woman experienced was surprising to the disciples. He was "a man perfect and upright: one that feared God and eschewed evil." What lacked he yet?⁵ Perhaps God, who saw into his heart, saw that he yet lacked one thing: that being a prosperous man, he had given no proof of "suffering affliction, and of patience."⁶ Therefore God permitted such evils to afflict him, as should bring his patience to "its perfect work," that he might become "perfect and complete in all the will of God."⁷

There may be often such reasons in the mind of infinite wisdom, why the servants of Christ should meet with delays, and perplexities, and disappointed hopes. Let them find comfort in the many examples which Scripture furnishes. If it be not now done unto them according to their will, it shall be as they would most desire if they could be acquainted with the purport and the event of their trials.

31. *And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis.*

32. *And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.*

33. *And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue;*

34. *And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.*

35. *And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.*

36. *And he charged them that they should tell no man:*

⁵ Job i. 1.

⁶ James v. 10.

⁷ Col. iv. 12.

but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it :

37. *And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well : he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.*

We are fond of inquiring why our Lord did not perform this miracle at once, but took the deaf man *aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and spit, and touched his tongue.* These means could not assist the cure.

A reason seems to be found in this : His power had been questioned : it had been said that he performed his miracles by the aid of Satan : and he chose to show that the virtue was in himself.

But what if we could give no reason ? What if it is a mystery, why *he charged them that they should tell no man ?* It might be expected that he should have motives for many of his actions which are not obvious to us. This we know, and are sure : *He has done all things well.* And it is good to implant and cherish this confidence in our minds, and restrain curious inquiries.

Many, however, are ready to allow what is here allowed, *He has done all things well ;* who do not act upon the acknowledgment, any more than the Jews who made it. I mean, that though they applauded his precepts and his character, they do not trust in him, as being “made unto us, of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”^s The acknowledgment, *He has done all things well,* unless accompanied by faith, will be their condemnation. As the chief priests

^s 1 Cor. i. 30.

and elders justly foresaw, when they were questioned concerning "the baptism of John whence it was." "If we shall say, from heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye then not believe him?"⁹ So we may reasonably ask—If *he has done all things well*; if his precepts teach heavenly holiness; if his character exemplifies divine wisdom; if his religion is a religion of peace and righteousness, which, if universally followed, would purify the world from sin, and relieve it from misery: why do ye not believe him? Why do ye not believe him when he says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life."

Such is the deceitfulness of our nature, that we have constant need to examine ourselves, whether the creed of our heart agrees with the creed of our reason: whether our feeling keeps pace with our conviction. This will be so, if among the things which Jesus *has done well*, we habitually reckon this as the first and greatest: not that *he made the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak*, but that he paid the ransom of our sins, and redeemed us from all iniquity.

⁹ Matt. xxi. 25.

LECTURE XCI.

FOUR THOUSAND MIRACULOUSLY FED. A SIGN
REFUSED TO THE PHARISEES. THE DISCIPLES
WARNED AGAINST THE LEAVEN OF THE PHA-
RISEES.

MARK viii. 1—21.

(Matt. xv. 32—39.)

1. *In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them,*

2. *I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat :*

3. *And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, hey will faint by the way : for divers of them came from far.*

4. *And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness ?*

5. *And he asked them, How many loaves have ye ? And they said, Seven.*

6. *And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground : and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them ; and they did set them before the people.*

7. *And they had a few small fishes : and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them.*

8. *So they did eat, and were filled : and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.*

9. *And they that had eaten were about four thousand : and he sent them away.*

Our Lord here has compassion on the multitude, who had now been with him three days, and made no provision for their wants. He will not send

them away fasting. Do we not see a proof in this of the manner in which he regards those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness?" Have they been with him many days? Do divers of them come from far? Have they been long seeking the means of grace? In seeking those means, must they use some exertion and submit to some self-denial? He will not send them empty away; his "grace shall supply all their need," and provide them with "the meat that perisheth not."

This miracle also illustrates the promise given in Matthew vi. 33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." This multitude came for instruction. He gave them that instruction; but he did not suffer them to want what was needful for the body. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

(Matt. xvi. 1—12.)

10. *And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha.*

11. *And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him.*

12. *And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.*

Here is a proof of that awful declaration, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." *Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given to this generation.*

Now it was needful that a proof should be given to the Jews, showing that Jesus was the long-promised and long-expected Deliverer. It was a reason-

able question which we read in John ii. 18, "What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" "What sign showest thou, that we may see and believe thee? What dost thou work?"

Our Lord constantly referred to such signs in proof of his divinity; saying, "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin." "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." (John xv. 24; x. 25, 37.) "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him."

But to these signs the scribes and Pharisees had long been blind. Seeing, they had seen not; and hearing, they had not understood. When Jesus wrought his miracles, they said, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils."¹ When the words of wisdom which he spoke, caused the people to exclaim, "Of a truth this is the prophet;"² their answer was, "Search and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." And now they came forth, with no honest intention, but seeking of him a sign from heaven, *tempting him*. He knew their thoughts. *He sighed deeply in his spirit*, "being grieved for the hardness of their hearts;" *and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given to this generation.* No other sign, no further sign. St. Matthew adds, "There shall no sign be given it, but the sign of

¹ Matt. xii. 24.² John vii. 40, 52.

the prophet Jonas." The next sign which they see, shall be that of my resurrection. Yet even this will not satisfy them, unless they have "the understanding heart." "If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe, though one rose from the dead."

Doubtless it will appear, at last, that sufficient evidence of the truths which are needful for his soul is given to every man, if he will honestly seek and use it, instead of neglecting or resisting it. "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." The Spirit perceives "afar off" the "willing mind;" enlightens, teaches it, and guides it "into all truth." "He that is of God, heareth God's words." Too many "hear them not, because they are not of God."

13. *And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side.*

14. *Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf.*

15. *And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.³*

16. *And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread.⁴*

17. *And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?*

18. *Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?*

³ Matthew (xvi. 6) calls it "the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." Probably therefore Herod, and the Herodians, inclined to the infidelity of the Sadducees.

⁴ Interpreting the words according to their *literal* meaning. We are without provisions, we have no bread, and he warns us not to seek it of the Pharisees.

19. *When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve.*

20. *And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven.*

21. *And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?*

They might surely have understood, from what they had experienced, that he would not suffer them to want what was indispensable, or oblige them to have recourse to their enemies for relief. But the disciples were slow, and we are all slow, to learn the truth, that “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Our Lord’s mind was turned to this bread, the bread which supplies a spiritual existence. For what, if the bread on which men feed is poisoned? And it was poisoned by *the leaven of the Pharisees, and the leaven of Herod*. By their perversion of truth; by their unwarranted traditions; by their formalities; by their hypocrisy; by their pretence of religion; and still worse, by the indifference to all religion of Herod and the Sadducees: by all these the heart was corrupted, when it ought to have been supported.

Such is the danger of all erroneous doctrine. It insinuates itself unawares, and the spiritual life, if not utterly destroyed, is deprived of all strength and vigour.

The best remedy of error is truth. And our Lord has pointed out the way in which the leaven of the Pharisees is to be avoided, when he declares, “I am the bread of life. I am the living bread

which came down from heaven : if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”⁵

“ Lord, evermore give us this bread ! ”

LECTURE XCII.

A BLIND MAN RECEIVES A CURE.—NECESSITY OF SELF-DENIAL.

MARK viii. 22—38.

22. *And he cometh to Bethsaida ; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him.*

23. *And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town ; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught.*

24. *And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking.*

25. *After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up : and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.*

26. *And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.*

The method in which sight is here restored to the blind man, is not unlike the way in which *spiritual* blindness is sometimes dispersed and cured.

⁵ See John vi. 48, 51 ; 34.

There is often the same gradual disclosure of the truths belonging to salvation.

The man who saw *men as trees, walking*, was very far from having such use of sight, as was safe or necessary for him. But still he was in a much better state than that in which Jesus found him. He *saw something*. And it is well, when a man has begun to see something respecting the soul; something beyond himself, and the present world, and the notions which are current in the world. It is a sign that “the Spirit of Christ” has touched him. There is reason to hope, that, in the end, he will *see things clearly*; will see that this world is a passage to eternity; see that Christ is the door of heaven; see that faith in him, is the key that opens it; see that holiness is the road along which he must walk, that he may be admitted into the kingdom of God at last.

This is *to look up*; to be *restored* to that state which Adam lost; to *see every thing clearly*. When this is perceived, “the eye is single, and the whole body shall be full of light.”

(Matt. xvi. 13—27. Luke ix. 18—27.)

27. *And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Cesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?*

28. *And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.*

29. *And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?, And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.*

30. *And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.*

31. *And he began to teach them, that the Son of man*

must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

32. *And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.*

33. *But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan : for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.*

34. *And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

35. *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it ; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.*

36. *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?*

37. *Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?*

38. *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation ; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*

By considering the whole of this passage together, we perceive most clearly its meaning and its application.

Jesus had declared, more explicitly than on any former occasion, the things which were appointed for him to suffer. *He spake that saying openly.*

Peter could not bear the thought. *He took him, and began to rebuke him,* "saying, Be it far from thee, Lord ; this shall not be unto thee."¹ This Jesus severely resented, saying to Peter that he was acting the part of Satan, and throwing a

¹ See Matt. xvi. 22.

stumbling-block in his way ; that his mind was not conformed to the will of God, but to the thoughts of man. No doubt, what I have foretold that he whom ye acknowledge to be the Christ, must suffer, is grievous to flesh and blood. But this is not to be considered. The will of God is to be considered.

Nay : let all know to what they must make up their minds. Then he *called the people unto him with his disciples also, and said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* Such are the terms of my religion. My disciples “shall have treasure in heaven.” “For eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God has laid up for them that love him.” But let no man believe that he can serve God, and this world too : that he can secure treasure in heaven, whilst his heart remains on earth below, and *savours not the things which be of God, but the things which be of men.*

This is described by the strongest terms. *Let him deny himself, and take up his cross.* Let him deny himself his present inclinations, and study to please God : let him refuse his present interests for the sake of his eternal interests : let him be ready to part with life itself : let him take up of his own accord the cross on which he is to suffer, and bear it on his shoulders,² if he should be called to such a trial in the way of duty. Nothing can be well conceived more painful, or more disgraceful, than a necessity like this. Yet this, says our Lord, those who come after him must be prepared for.

² This the Romans obliged malefactors to do.

There is reason to believe that Peter, who gave occasion to the saying which we read here, bore this cross literally. The disciples of Christ are rarely called to so severe a trial. But the spirit of the sentence is closely interwoven with the whole texture of christian faith. "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he will deny us." And, be assured, a cross is in every man's way. The heart which we bear about us, the world in which we live, are as a cross to us. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," are as a cross to us. It is no duty to step aside, in order to seek a cross: but it is sin to step aside, in order to avoid it; to yield to Satan rather than oppose him. As it has been often expressed, no cross, no crown. Whatever troubles or losses, whatever inward vexations or outward hindrances you meet with in discharging your duty to God or man, these are your cross, these you must take up as you go along, and neither repine nor sink under them. And the nature of the heart must be changed, and the nature of the world must be changed, before the faithful and watchful Christian shall cease to meet with these. Even as men, we cannot but find many crosses in the world. But as Christians we must expect more, because it is easier to yield than to contend; easier to swim with the stream, than to strive against it; easier to give way to corrupt nature, than to resist it, and keep it in subjection.

This, however, is to follow Christ. This, and nothing else. He set the example; and he issues the command. Self-denial here—till his precepts

“for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame.” And it is worth while. *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* O that every one would meditate on this truth, as he lieth down, and as he riseth up, and as he walketh by the way!

LECTURE XCIII.

CHRIST IS TRANSFIGURED.
FORETELLS HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

MARK ix. 1—13.

(Matt. xvii. 1—13. Luke ix. 28—37.)

1. *And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.*

The declaration made in this verse, belongs rather to the conversation which preceded it, than to what is related in the present chapter. Our Lord had been encouraging his disciples to confess and obey him, by bidding them look forward to the time when he should come *in the glory of his Fa-*

ther with the holy angels. And then he adds, Improbable as this may seem now, to those who see me, “in form and fashion as a man,” nay, as “a servant,” and “of no reputation;” *there are some that stand here which shall not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.*

The expression refers to something distant, and not belonging to the apostles in general: something which a few only shall live to witness. And this agrees with the destruction of Jerusalem, which John, and probably others of the apostles survived, and which, being the fulfilment of our Lord’s prophecies, and the signal punishment of his rejection, is properly and frequently termed “the coming of the Son of man with power.”

But in one sense, one very important sense, they all saw *the kingdom of God come with power*: when they saw the effect of the Holy Spirit, and many “receiving the word gladly;” when they saw “the Lord adding to the church daily such as should be saved:” when they saw “a great company of the priests obedient to the faith:” when they saw “the Gentiles beseeching that the word might be preached unto them,” and “turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.”

There was no less of divine power, in this, no less to astonish a considerate mind, than even in the display of glory which is now to be related, and which some have supposed to explain *the coming of the kingdom of God with power.*

2. *And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves : and he was transfigured before them.*

3. *And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow ; so as no fuller on earth can white them.*

4. *And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses : and they were talking with Jesus.*

5. *And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here : and let us make three tabernacles ; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*

6. *For he wist not what to say ; for they were sore afraid.*

Peter spoke here from a sudden impulse, produced by the impression upon his mind of what he was witnessing. *Master, it is good for us to be here.* Here let us set up our tent ; here let us dwell, and not leave this glorious scene. He found himself in the company of “ saints in light ;” how could he return to the world again ?

Faith, however, brings the Christian into this company, even whilst he remains in the world ; for “ faith is the evidence of things not seen.” St. Paul reminds the Hebrew Christians, (Heb. xii. 23,) that they “ are come unto an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and unto God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.” Let us ever remember the dignity of our “ high calling :” and think with the apostles, *It is good for us to be here,* and to be numbered with such an assembly. And the thought should have a favourable influence.

“ Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race which is set before us.” If we are thus employed, it will be good for us to be here, as long as God sees fit: and “ to depart, and to be with Christ,” will be “ far better,” when our appointed course is finished and our race is run.

7. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

The voice came for our sakes, as well as for the sake of the apostles; warning us of the danger of neglecting to hear Him, by whom “ God hath in these last days spoken unto” men. Is it not wonderful, that any should refuse to hear him? That God should have sent his Son into the world, and that men should confess that he has sent him, and yet should so often live as if no message had been delivered! As if it had not been commanded us, Hear him, for “ he hath the words of eternal life.”

Let us, at least, hear him with the hearing ear and the obedient heart. We talk of eternal life; we profess to desire it, and to look for it. But never forget, who is its “author.” And never forget who they are, who shall really inherit it. He is the author of eternal life “to them that obey him.”

8. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.

9. *And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.*

10. *And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.*

11. *And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?*

12. *And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought.*

13. *But I say unto you, that Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.¹*

If we place ourselves in the situation of the apostles here, we shall not be surprised at their state of mind. They had just beheld a scene, which must have realized their highest hopes, and have convinced them that they had not erred in believing Jesus to be the Christ of God. We learn from St. Peter that it did leave upon them that impression. (2 Pet. i. 16.) “We were eye-witnesses of his majesty;—For he received from God the Father honour and glory; and the voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.” Such were his recollections, after the lapse of more than thirty years.

But the subject which Moses and Elias had discoursed of, was “the decease which he should ac-

¹ After this explanation, the disciples, as we learn from St. Matthew, understood that John the Baptist was the prophet spoken of by Malachi, under the type of Elijah, who should precede the Messiah. See Matt. xvii. 13; Mal. iv. 5.

comply at Jerusalem.” And now they were *charged to tell no man what they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.* He then, “the Prince of glory,” must taste of death. What should this mean?

It was indeed *written of the Son of man that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought.* He was to be “despised and rejected of men:” he was to be “brought as a lamb to the slaughter;” he was to be “cut off out of the land of the living.”

But, again, this was *prophecy*: it had not been explained by the fulfilment; and we may well suppose that it would be hard for those to believe, who were daily witnessing superhuman power, and had just been spectators of superhuman “majesty.”

The prophet, therefore, had not spoken too strongly, when he said, “Behold, and wonder: for I work a work in your days, which ye shall in no wise believe though a man declare it unto you.”²

To the “despisers” of this work the prophet says, “Behold, and wonder, *and perish.*” May the Holy Spirit so open the eyes of our understandings, that we may behold, and wonder, and LIVE!

² See Acts xiii. 41.

LECTURE XCIV.

A LUNATIC RESTORED.—NEED OF PRAYER AND SELF-DENIAL.

MARK ix. 14—29.

(Matt. xvii. 14—21. Luke ix. 37—42.)

14. *And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them.*

15. *And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.*

16. *And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them.*

17. *And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit ;*

18. *And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him : and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away : and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out ; and they could not.*

19. *He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you ? how long shall I suffer you ?¹ bring him unto me.*

20. *And they brought him unto him : and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him ; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.*

21. *And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him ? And he said, Of a child.*

22. *And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into*

¹ This is spoken from a knowledge that the failure, the want of success in the disciples, was owing to the weakness of their faith.

the waters, to destroy him : but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.

23. *Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*

24. *And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief.*

This man was supplicating for a favour. That he might receive it, there must be on his part a qualification. *If thou canst believe.* He must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he might be partaker of his benefits. And his belief was at present very imperfect. His prayer shows it ; *if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.*

Certainly there was much to hinder this belief. So is it hinted in the expression, *If thou canst believe.* Jesus was in humble condition, and nothing of external dignity to make it appear that he was the Son of God : “no beauty that man should desire him.” And by all who were in highest authority among the people he was rejected and opposed.

On the other hand, to one who could lay aside preconceived and worldly notions, there were sufficient grounds of faith. His character, his miracles, his doctrines, proclaimed him to be the expected Saviour.

The state of mind occasioned by such conflicting circumstances is singularly described. *Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.* I believe ; I see and hear that which commands my belief. But thou knowest the weakness of our frame. That

the Son of God should become man ; that he should appear in a low, despised condition, so contrary to human expectations, and to the expectation of our country ! *Help thou mine unbelief !*

It is good for us to put this question to ourselves : Can we believe ? We do not *deny* that Jesus is the Son of God : but do we practically apply the truth ? If called to loss of favour, or of credit, or of fortune, “for righteousness’ sake,” could we risk or suffer all for Him ? If lying on the bed of sickness, or brought to the hour of death, could we venture all upon Him ? Could we say, “I know in whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep what I have committed to him ?”

It ought to be so ; it must be so, that our sin may be forgiven, and we may be enabled to fulfil all righteousness. *If thou canst believe : all things are possible to him that believeth.*

We have need then of the prayer, *Help thou mine unbelief.* “Every good and perfect gift cometh down from above.” And of all gifts, faith is the first and best. The Spirit knoweth our weakness, and “helpeth our infirmities ;” and will in the end “establish, strengthen, settle” us in the more perfect “knowledge of the Father, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.”

25. *When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.*

26. *And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him : and he was as one dead ; insomuch that many said, He is dead.*

27. *But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up ; and he arose.*

28. *And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out ?*

29. *And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

Whatever was out of the course of nature, or beyond human power, was alike impossible to the disciples, and we cannot discern a difference between one miracle and another, one evil spirit and another. In a subject confessedly mysterious, there may be something which we do not apprehend.

Probably, however, they were allowed to fail in this instance, that they might perceive the necessity of depending entirely on him from whom their power proceeded. And the mode in which this dependence is shown and exercised, is left as a general lesson to Christians, in the words, *This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.* Only an habitual course of prayer and self-denial can lead to that state of heart, that true and lively faith, to which every thing gives way ; to which God denies nothing.

And what we practically learn from the example is to this purpose. The disciples could not change the course of nature, but through the power of that faith, of which prayer and self-denial are inseparable attendants. Christians can only change their moral nature by the same means.

As of evil spirits, some are represented in Scripture as more pernicious than others : so of moral habits, some are worse than others ; are more deeply rooted in the constitution, or more strength-

ened than others by the course of life. We may justly say, where a vice has been long indulged, has come upon a man *from a child, this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

We are also led to conclude, that though all Christians must “watch unto prayer,” must “pray without ceasing;” there are some occasions when more urgent, continual, and particular prayer is needed. And though all Christians must be temperate in all things, there may be some by whom more special and careful abstinence is required. Where the faith is such as leads to the persevering use of these means, we have reason to hope *that all things are possible*; that there is no kind of evil which does not *come forth by prayer and fasting.*

St. Paul lived in this course of self-denial. He describes it, when he says, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.” “I will not be brought within the power of any.” “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.”

Those Christians have approached, those Christians will approach, nearest to St. Paul in personal religion, and in spiritual usefulness, who have most closely followed his example; who have most truly been able to say, “The world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.”

LECTURE XCV.

HUMILITY IS TAUGHT BY THE EXAMPLE OF A CHILD.—THE DISCIPLES ACCUSE ONE WHO FOLLOWED NOT WITH THEM.

MARK ix. 30—42.

(Matt. xvii. 22, 23. Luke ix. 44—50.)

30. *And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee ; and he would not that any man should know it.*

31. *For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him ; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.*

32. *But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.*

33. *And he came to Capernaum : and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way ?*

34. *But they held their peace : for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.*

35. *And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.*

(Matt. xviii. 1—9.)

36. *And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them : and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,*

37. *Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me : and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.*

This was figurative instruction. It is not on the child itself, but on the character of the child, that the blessing is pronounced. The child is taken

and set in the midst, as an example of the character which is approved of God. The child is meek and humble, from the simplicity of its age. The man must be meek and humble, through the power of divine grace. And those who are thus meek and humble, are to be *received in Christ's name*: they are "the poor in spirit," to whom he has pledged a blessing.

The Pharisee and the publican, (as described Luke xviii. 9,) may be samples of the two states of mind, one of which is approved, the other condemned. The Pharisee, like the disciples when they *disputed among themselves who should be greatest*, had an high opinion of himself and his own merits. It is expressed in the words, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." Such an one might be justly rebuked by the sentence, *If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all*. For "he that exalteth himself shall be abased."

The publican, on the contrary, "would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." Here was the simple and humble spirit represented by the image of the child. And to that simple spirit of self-renunciation and conscious unworthiness, are the promises of the gospel offered, and the Divine approval given. Such are dear to Christ and dear to Almighty God, and are therefore to be dear to the followers of Christ, and kindly treated by his ministers. *Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, (alone,)*

but him that sent me. “For many that are first shall be last, and the last first.”

38. *And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us : and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.*

39. *But Jesus said, Forbid him not : for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.*

40. *For he that is not against us is on our part.*

We do not know the particular case to which this complaint of John alluded ; or how one could be casting out devils in the name of Christ, and yet not follow his party. Some imagine that it may have been one of the Baptist's disciples.

Occasion, however, is given to an important remark. *Forbid him not : for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.* You say, that he is *casting out devils* : and you say, that *he followeth not us*. Forbid him not. Whether he followeth us or no, he is doing a good work ; and he cannot be an enemy of me or mine, who does a good work in my name. He cannot “enter the strong man's house, and spoil his goods,” unless he goes in the name of him who is stronger still. And if he does this, he is *not against us* ; nay, *he is on our part*, he is serving our cause.

This is a practical explanation of our Lord's doctrine concerning false prophets. “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles ?” Can valuable produce come from an useless or pernicious tree ? Or can that tree be useless or pernicious which bears va-

luable fruit? Can that man be deserving of condemnation, who is relieving others from their heaviest misfortunes? who *is casting out devils in my name!*

In the same spirit St. Paul wrote of some who *followed not him*, did not belong to his party, but still proclaimed the truth of the gospel. (Phil. i. 14—18.) “Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached: and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”

The circumstances here brought forward, and made matter of complaint by the disciples, leads our Lord to allude to a time, not now distant, when a much severer trial of opposition awaited them, than that of a man's following not their company: when many, instead of merely *not being against them*, should revile, and persecute his meek and humble followers, only because they were his followers: and many, because they professed his name, should suffer hunger and thirst and cold and nakedness. So that the remark, *He that is not against us is on our part*, seems to introduce a thought of this kind. “Indeed, it is no small thing, not to be against us. And blessed are they, who are so far well disposed towards me and my religion.”

41. *For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.*

42. *And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.*

Great difficulties were approaching. "Affliction and persecution should arise for the word's sake."² Many should "be offended," and "fall away." This would be grievous for them: but still more grievous for "that man by whom the offence cometh."³ A death which might appear dreadful at the time, would be a far lighter evil than the future retribution reserved for the enemy of *one of these little ones*.

And in proportion should be the recompence of any who should favour the disciples, and assist them in their distress: who should relieve their fiery trial, even by *a cup of water*, and the kindness which accompanied it. Such circumstances try what is in the heart: whether men value others, *because they belong to Christ*. They cannot love the Christian as a Christian, unless they love the Christian's Lord. And as "the Lord knoweth them that are his," and will avenge them in the end: so also will he reward them, and all who favour them, with an exceeding great reward.

² See Parable of the Sower, Mark iv. 17, Luke viii. 13

³ Matt. xviii. 7.

LECTURE XCVI.

NECESSITY OF RENOUNCING ALL OCCASIONS OF
OFFENCE.—THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIAL.

MARK ix. 43—50.

We left Jesus in the midst of a discourse, in which he had pronounced a blessing on all who should favour the least of his disciples, should relieve their difficulties or mitigate their afflictions. *Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.* He had also declared the sad consequence which should follow the oppressing them, and causing them to fall from the faith. *Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.*

This leads him to speak further, and more generally of the danger of inducement to sin; of causes of offence; of whatever occasions a departure from God. Rather than yield to these, or be subject to them, it was expedient to submit to the greatest self-denial and the dearest sacrifice.

(Matt. xviii. 8—10.)

43. *And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched :¹*

¹ See Isa. lxvi. 24.

44. *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

45. *And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:*

46. *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

47. *And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell-fire:*

48. *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

In these figurative expressions, the eye or the limb signify the occasion of *offence*; i. e. the occasion of departing from the faith, or of acting inconsistently with it: whether that occasion be a passion, a desire, as in a similar passage which occurs in St. Matthew:² or whether it be, as seems to be meant here, a friend who is loved, or an enemy who is dreaded. If he be an enemy, woe be unto him: if he be a friend, if one of thy own household become thy foe, beware of him: though he be dear to you as one of the most valuable members of the body, cut off the connexion, and cast it from thee. It is better for thee, with the loss of that which is most precious in this world, with a loss which leaves you as it were *halt*, and *maimed*, and *blind*, to enter into the kingdom of God, than after the enjoyment of every earthly comfort to be cast into hell fire, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. “For we look not at the things which are seen, and are temporal,

² Ch. v. 29, 30.

but at the things which are not seen and are eternal.”

When Nicodemus, for example, being one of the Pharisees, took the part of Jesus, saying, (John vii. 51,) “Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee?”

Now here the Pharisees were to Nicodemus in the place of the *right hand* or *right eye*, which he was to cast from him. They were a stumbling-block in his way. To do what duty required, and separate himself from the party to which he belonged, was no easy trial. Nothing could make him consent to this, except a conviction that it was desirable *to enter into the kingdom of God*, with a despised and persecuted party, rather than with the approbation of rulers and friends *to be cast into hell*.

When the early Christians saw fit to make common cause and common purse, and those who were possessors of lands or houses sold them for the support of others, the estate of Ananias and Sapphira was their snare. It was an offence to them: and “they kept back part of the price, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”³ To give up the whole of the possession, would evidently have been to them like the parting with a hand, or a foot, or an eye. It was a self-denial to which they could not consent. But it would have been better for them *to enter into the kingdom of God maimed* of their earthly possessions, than having their whole fortune *to be cast into hell fire*,

³ Acts iv. 32—37; v. 1—3.

where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

It was needful, therefore, for our Lord to urge these strong enforcements. He knew the trials to which his disciples must be exposed; not his present disciples alone, but other in every future age. He knew that nothing except the most overpowering motives could engage them to resist temptation, and remain stedfast in the faith. Therefore, he leaves them motives which might well have this effect, and supply strength to the weakness of nature. "What shall it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

The whole is concluded with a remark, which shows it to be part of the will of God, that his people should be proved by trials of this kind.

49. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.

As much as to say, Do not wonder at the mortification which I have been predicting and requiring. Every one must expect to undergo mortification, and consent to self-denial.⁴

Under the law it was commanded, being rendered necessary by the climate of Judea, (Lev. ii. 13,) "Every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt: neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from the meat offering. With all thy sacrifices thou

⁴ The explanation here given of those two verses will be found in Bp. Hurd, Sermon XI. It appears to me the best solution of a passage of acknowledged difficulty.

shalt offer salt." To the typical sacrifice, therefore, salt was indispensable, that it might be pure and incorrupt. And to the spiritual sacrifice, the sacrifice of the christian heart, trials are the seasoning which make it acceptable. Every disciple of Christ *shall be salted*, i. e. preserved from corruption, be cleansed and purified, *with fire*: with fiery trials; with the furnace of affliction. This is the preparation, the seasoning, which shall be to it what salt is to the literal sacrifice, that which renders it pleasing and conformable to the will of God.

Then follows a remark, arising from the idea which had been just introduced, the mention of *salt* as belonging to the sacrifice.

50. *Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.*

Salt is a metaphor, expressing what preserves the moral nature, as well as the animal nature, from corruption. That which preserves the christian nature, the renewed heart, that which fits it for the fire of temptation, is FAITH. But if that faith have lost its active and its searching power, wherewith shall the heart be *seasoned*? how shall it be preserved in a suitable state for acceptance with God?

Have, therefore, salt in yourselves. Have with you that preparation of the heart which comes from christian faith; and give the proof of it by being *at peace one with another*. "For by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples:"—by this shall faith in me be estimated and proved:—"that ye have love one towards another."

LECTURE XCVII.

DIVORCEMENT FORBIDDEN.
CHILDREN RECEIVED AND BLESSED.

MARK x. 1—16.

(Matt. xix. 1—16.)

1. *And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judea by the farther side of Jordan : and the people resort unto him again ; and, as he was wont, he taught them again.*

2. *And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife ? tempting him.*

3. *And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you ?*

4. *And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.*

5. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.*

6. *But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.*

7. *For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife ;*

8. *And they twain shall be one flesh : so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.*

9. *What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

10. *And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter.*

11. *And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away*

his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her.¹

12. *And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.*

This is one of the cases which explains our Lord's own account of himself: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." The original will of God was that the woman should be a help-mate for the man, and the man for the woman: and that the marriage tie, united under God's sanction, should be dissolved only by the hand of God in death. And this law was as much made for man, as man for this law. It is the law of domestic peace, comfort, and harmony.

But an "enemy sowed tares" among the good seed. Sin had opposed the will of God. And Moses, *for the hardness of men's hearts*, had permitted a relaxation of the original law, and allowed in certain cases *a bill of divorcement*. The custom of the Jews had multiplied the causes, and shamefully increased the practice.

Jesus had now come to fulfil the law, to restore all things, to acquaint us with what God approves, and by the power of his grace to make men approve the same, and bring their thoughts and actions into agreement with it. And "his commandments are not grievous." Experience proves that they are "the ways of pleasantness and peace."

¹ Except in cases of adultery. See the parallel passages, Matt. v. 32; xix. 9.

The disciples, however, had been bred up in a different school. They hardly yet perceived the beauty of the precept, "Let every one of you so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."² *In the house they asked him again of the same matter.* The Spirit of God made that clear to them afterwards which now they could not receive; and taught them to enforce the law, against which at first their hearts rebelled.

(Luke xviii. 15—17.)

13. *And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them.*

14. *But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*

15. *Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*

16. *And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.*

Two very important inferences are derived from this passage. It acquaints us, by a vivid example, what is the nature of that character which shall *enter into the kingdom of God.* *Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*

This I pass by now, and consider the other subject arising out of this passage: the encouragement which it gives us, relieving our just fears concerning our children, born as they are "to trouble," and what is far more serious, born as they are with

² Eph. v. 28—33.

sinful hearts, “very far gone from original righteousness.”

We are here instructed to hope, that “as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

The children here presented to our Lord, were not intended to be taught, but to be blessed by him. They were too young to profit by his teaching, and therefore *the disciples rebuked those that brought them*. They did not approve the interruption, or perceive the object it was to answer. *But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God*. Doubtless he pitied these children, strangers as they were in an evil world, full of danger to the soul. *And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them*.

Justly, therefore, does our Church insist on this, as a strong indication of his will respecting baptism. Justly does it encourage parents by the example of this incident; “Doubt ye not, therefore, but earnestly believe, that he will likewise favourably receive these infants; that he will embrace them with the arms of his mercy; that he will give unto them the blessings of eternal life, and make them partakers of his everlasting kingdom.”³

At the same time we must not deceive ourselves as to the force of this example. We must remember that there were certain conditions connected with the blessing here bestowed. It was not here,

³ Baptismal Service.

as on a previous occasion, when *Jesus took a child* which happened to be present, and set him in the midst, and made him an example of humility. In this case the children were neither present accidentally, nor introduced in compliance with a formal practice; they were *brought to Jesus* by those interested in them, “that he might lay his hands upon them, and pray,”⁴ *and touch them*. They were brought, therefore, in reliance upon his power, in faith of the virtue which might proceed from him, and be a blessing to these children.

When a like faith is shown in a like manner, the conduct of our Lord gives reason to suppose that he will not withhold that blessing. He does not dismiss the parents and say, Were your children of an age to believe, it should be unto them according to their faith; but I have no blessing for those who cannot solicit it for themselves. *But he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them*. Surely this action would be calculated to mislead us, if he meant us to consider the baptism of infants as a vain ceremony, as a mere outward rite, from which no spiritual benefit is to be expected or derived.

Still, if we expect the same advantage, the same mind must be in us which was in the friends of these children. We must come to baptism in faith, and not in compliance with a customary form. We must come, believing that our children, without Christ, are miserable, lost, and helpless; “being dead through the offence of one.” We must come,

⁴ St. Matthew in the parallel passage, xix. 13.

believing that “being justified by his blood, they shall be saved from wrath through him.”⁵ We must come, believing that “as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” And then we humbly may hope “that our Lord Jesus Christ will vouchsafe to receive those infants, will sanctify them with the Holy Ghost, will give them the kingdom of heaven, and life everlasting.”⁶

In this manner the Israelites were taught to believe, that the ignorance and weakness of infancy did not render their children unacceptable to God. As infants they were solemnly dedicated to him by the covenant of circumcision. And trusting to this intimation of the Divine will, confirmed as it is by numerous scriptural arguments, we bring our infants into covenant with Christ, at an age when they are themselves unconscious of the blessing. We believe that he will receive such children into his favour; will consider them as heirs of his kingdom; will shed abroad his Spirit upon their hearts, and lead them in the way everlasting.

At present, this inestimable privilege is derived from their parents’ faith. Hereafter, when they come to age, it must be confirmed and preserved by their own.

⁵ Rom. v. 15, 9.

⁶ See Baptismal Service.

LECTURE XCVIII.

THE QUESTION ANSWERED, WHAT SHALL I DO
TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?
DANGER OF RICHES, SHOWN BY THE CONDUCT
OF THE INQUIRER.

MARK x. 17—31.

(Matt. xix. 16—30. Luke xviii. 18—30.)

17. *And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*

18. *And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.¹*

19. *Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.*

20. *And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.*

21. *Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.*

22. *And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.*

In the account of this instructive history, which we find in three of the Evangelists, one circumstance is noted by St. Mark alone. *Jesus, beholding him, loved him.*

¹ Alluding to the flattering titles which the Jewish teachers delighted to receive from their hearers.

He was, therefore, a well-meaning inquirer ; he neither came out of malice, nor idle curiosity, but he kneeled before Jesus, and gave him a title of respect, saying, *Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life ?*

It seems probable, for the same reason, that where he says of the commandments, *Master, all these have I observed from my youth*, he did not mean to make a self-righteous boast, but to say that he knew the will of God as contained in the law, and that he had directed his life generally according to that law. Otherwise, we should hardly be told that *Jesus beholding him, loved him*, except as he loves all mankind :—he would hardly have felt a special interest in him.

He loved him, and would have made him his disciple. *One thing thou lackest*. God is making a further revelation to his people. He is accomplishing the promise made to your forefathers. “You believe in God, believe also in me ;” “in him whom he hath sent.” Go, part with thy worldly possessions ; distribute the produce to the poor, and *thou shalt have treasure in heaven : and come, take up the cross, and follow me*.

This, however, was a sacrifice for which he was not prepared. *He was sad at that saying*, when he found that he could not inherit eternal life on easier terms ; and *he went away grieved, for he had great possessions*.

This gives occasion to point out the danger of worldly advantages : the danger of riches, because they open the way to those earthly enjoyments, by which the heart is too likely to be ensnared.

23. *And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God !*

24. *And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God !*

25. *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God ! Not because riches exclude them. “Charge them that be rich in this world, that they be rich in good works, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.”² But because it is hard to *have riches*, and not to *trust in riches* : not to be attached to what they will procure ; and so attached, that they, and not the kingdom of God, shall be sought in the first place, and treated as the “one thing needful.”

Great indeed must be the power of divine grace, when it breaks through the net of these allurements, and enables those who may have the full enjoyment of things temporal, to set their affections on things eternal.

26. *And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved ?*

27. *And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God : for with God all things are possible.*

28. *Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.*

29. *And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's,*

30. *But he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions ; and in the world to come eternal life.*

31. *But many that are first shall be last ; and the last first.*

One sign of the extraordinary wisdom with which the Scriptures are written, is found in this: that they show us real characters, characters of men of like passions and circumstances with ourselves. We see how these have acted ; and we see the consequences of their conduct ; and we are thus enabled to judge, with more accuracy and effect than would otherwise be possible, whose example is to be imitated and whose avoided.

In this history, for instance, we see a man who refused the advice of the Redeemer, when he invited him to *take up the cross, and follow him, and he should have treasure in heaven*. And we see others who did not refuse: who did *leave all, and follow him*. Which made the choice of wisdom ?

Without doubt, at the time, the choice of this young man would have been thought wisest by those around him. Had he sold all that he had, and divided it among the poor, and become a disciple of Jesus, his relations and friends would surely have wondered at his folly.

We, however, looking back, are able to form a more just opinion. Our Lord offered him treasure in heaven, if he would leave all, and follow him.

He chose to retain his earthly treasure, and to refuse the offer of treasure in heaven. This happened eighteen hundred years ago. What is now become of his *great possessions*? What can they profit him? Can they confer happiness on his soul, or prevent its misery?

If, indeed, he could have kept his possessions eighteen hundred years, it might appear something: it is a long period of time, except when compared with eternity. But we know that he could not have enjoyed his earthly treasure more than twenty or thirty years. This is the longest expectation which the average of human life allows.

Whereas, had he obeyed the invitation of our Lord, whenever he departed, he would have been "with Christ;" he would already have been in the enjoyment of happiness unspeakable, and he would possess the sure and certain prospect of still greater happiness when the soul shall be re-united to the body, and received into the kingdom "prepared for the righteous from the foundation of the world." Could he be permitted to choose again, can we now doubt what his choice would be?

Suffer, then, his experience to determine you. What would have been good for him, is good for all. What he forfeited, you will forfeit too, if you allow any one worldly good to keep you back in your pursuit of heaven. Worldly possessions are valuable: they provide the means of many comforts, they afford the opportunity of being useful to our fellow-creatures. But they perish with us: therefore they are not worth the risk of what is to last for ever. Worldly pleasures are good, when they

are innocent, and those that are innocent are the truest; but whether innocent or guilty, they come to an end; therefore they are not worth the risk of what is to last for ever. The favour and the praise of man is good; it is pleasant to be spoken well of, and painful to be reproached; but the praise and favour of God will be of real value, when those who now speak either well or evil of us, have learnt a better rule to judge by, than this world affords. Do not then, for the sake of any of these things; for the sake of a little more gain, or a little more amusement, or a little more of men's good word, do not act the part of this unhappy young man, and go away from your Redeemer. Do anything, leave anything, suffer anything, rather than fail to "make your calling and election sure." *So shall you receive an hundred-fold now in this time.* In a just hope of acceptance with God, in conscious dependence upon your Saviour, in the support of his Spirit, in the progressive sanctification of your souls, in the friendship of those whose favour is most truly valuable, you shall *receive an hundred-fold now in this time, and in the world to come, eternal life.*

LECTURE XCIX.

JESUS FORETELLS HIS DEATH.—AMBITION OF THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE REPROVED.—BLIND BARTIMÆUS HEALED.

MARK x. 32—52.

(Matt. xx. 17—34. Luke xviii. 31—43.)

32. *And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem ; and Jesus went before them : and they were amazed ; and as they followed, they were afraid.¹ And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him,*

33. *Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem ; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes ; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles :*

34. *And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him : and the third day he shall rise again.*

Such was the *prophecy*. The *history* was related by St. Peter, some two months afterwards : Acts ii. 22 :) “Ye men of Israel, hear these words : Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God

¹ Probably their amazement and their fear arose from what Jesus had frequently declared to them that he must needs suffer in Jerusalem. So (John xi. 8) “his disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee ; and goest thou thither again ?”

did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know ; Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain : whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death. Whereof we all are witnesses.”

So true it proved, that the Son of man goeth, as was determined of him. “ Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.”

35. *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.*

36. *And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you ?*

37. *They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.*

38. *But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask : can ye drink of the cup that I drink of ? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ?*

39. *And they say unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of ; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized :*

40. *But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give ; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.*

In one sense, we know, and are sure, that every place in the kingdom of heaven is *Christ's to give*, and his alone. “ All things are delivered unto him of the Father.” “ For as the Father hath life in himself ; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself ; and hath given him authority to

execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man."

But it was *not Christ's to give*, in the way of arbitrary favour or partiality, or except *to those for whom it is prepared*: namely, those "who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality." It was morally impossible for Christ to assign it to others.

And a great practical lesson is derived to us, from this unseasonable demand of the two disciples. It is vain to expect a place in the kingdom of Christ, without the prescribed qualifications. And middle place there is none; no place between the kingdom of Christ and the regions of darkness where Satan reigns. But in this there is nothing arbitrary or exclusive. Nothing assigned to one, from which another is necessarily shut out. Nothing which our Lord would even give to his favourite apostle, and deny to another preferring a like claim. John was beloved by our Lord in an especial manner; yet he was one of the two to whom this declaration was returned.

This, then, is the reflection which each one of us ought to dwell upon. Certain characters will sit in the kingdom of Christ, and except to these, it is not even his to give. And we who hear this positive assurance, are either among those for whom it is prepared, or for whom it is not prepared. Those for whom it is prepared, are clearly described. They are described by that same apostle, who now met with a rebuke, because instead of entering "by the door into the sheep-fold," he was trying "to climb up some other way." But he found the

way, the true way: and he has opened it to us also. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life: and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life."² Faith, vital, practical faith in him as the author and giver of the heavenly kingdom, is the indispensable qualification. He "is the door of the sheep." He is the entrance, through which his flock shall be received into the heavenly fold.³

His flock are they, who "hear his voice and follow him." And as they must have thus attached themselves to him, so likewise they must *drink of the cup that he drank of, and be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with.* They must submit, as he did, to the will of God, whether it calls them to enjoy, or to suffer. For "if they suffer with him, they shall also reign with him." They must "mortify, therefore, their members, which are upon the earth:" they must "crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts." For every man who hath this faith in him, "purifieth himself," that he may be "counted worthy to attain that world," and to "stand before the Son of man" when he comes in glory.

41. *And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.*

42. *But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.*

² 1 John v. 11.

³ John x. 3.

43. *But so shall it not be among you : but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister :*

44. *And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*

45. *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

Such is the character of the religion of Christ, and of the views which it introduces : entirely distinct from those of the present world. The Gentiles look to the present world : those who are great among them desire *to exercise authority and lordship*. It is natural and reasonable that it should be so. The Christian looks to a heavenly kingdom, and therefore is content to be a servant here, that he may reign hereafter. This too is reasonable, and follows as a natural consequence from his faith. But as it is not natural to his inclination, he has an example to encourage him. He can be called to no self-denial, like that of his Master, who when he came *not to be ministered unto, but to minister*, resigned not earthly state, but heavenly majesty ; and submitted not merely to privation, but to misery, and *gave his life a ransom for many*.

Therefore let the same mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus : “possess your souls in patience,” and “be clothed with humility.”

46. *And they came to Jericho : and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimæus, the son of Timæus, sat by the highway side begging.**

* Matthew speaks of *two* blind men. Probably Bartimæus was a well known person, and is therefore mentioned by Mark and Luke individually.

47. *And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*

48. *And many charged him that he should hold his peace : but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David. have mercy on me.*

49. *And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise ; he calleth thee.*

50. *And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.*

51. *And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee ? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight.*

52. *And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way ; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.*

We may hope that not only the natural blindness, but the spiritual blindness of this man was healed, who immediately when he *received his sight, followed Jesus in the way.* He alone who cured the one, could remove the other.

The natural blindness belongs to few ; the spiritual blindness belongs to all, unless it be removed by him who “came a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in him should not abide in darkness.”⁵ Has he enlightened us ? Are we “walking in the light ?” St. Peter offers a test by which this question may be tried ; pointing out certain qualifications, like those before alluded to, which must abound in those who have not received the grace of God in vain, and saying, “He that lack-

eth these things is blind.” “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”⁶

LECTURE C.

JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM IN TRIUMPH.—CASTS OUT OF THE TEMPLE THOSE WHO PROFANED IT BY MERCHANDIZE.

MARK xi. 1—19.

(Matt. xxi. 1—21. Luke xix. 29—48. John xii. 14—19.)

1. *And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples,*

2. *And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him.*

3. *And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.*

4. *And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met: and they loose him.*

⁶ 2 Pet. i. 9, 10.

5. *And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt ?*

6. *And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded : and they let them go.*

This presents a lively picture of the way in which “known unto the Lord are all his works,” and the heart of every man is open to his view. He foresaw that the owner of this colt would *straightway send him*, when he knew that *the Lord had need of him*. So he perceives in every case, what hearts are opposed, and what are conformable to his will. He directed his disciples to the spot where *the colt was tied*, which was needed for this occasion. So he discovers the dispositions and the talents which are suited to his purpose, and calls them to his service. May he never behold, in any of us, a heart estranged from the duty which we owe him, or unworthy of his grace !

7. *And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him ; and he sat upon him.*

8. *And many spread their garments in the way : and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way.*

9. *And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna ; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord :*

10. *Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord : Hosanna in the highest.*¹

The rulers and the conquerors of this world come among the people with such processions and

¹ “ Let the kingdom be happily begun and flourish, which God is to erect, according to his promise made to our father David. Prosperity be to the Messiah, from him who dwelleth in the highest ” — *Whitby*.

*he came to it, he found nothing but leaves : for the time of figs was not yet.**

14. *And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.*

15. *And they come to Jerusalem : and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves ;*

16. *And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple.*

17. *And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer ?⁵ but ye have made it a den of thieves.*

18. *And the scribes and the chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him : for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.*

19. *And when even was come, he went out of the city.*

Had their hearts been under the influence of grace, the justice of his words would have sunk deep into them. But what fails to melt, hardens. The scribes and chief priests, when they heard his reproof, instead of studying how they might best render *the house of God* what God designed it for, *the house of prayer*,—sought how they might destroy him.

The circumstances here related, sufficiently illustrate the emblem of the fig-tree, and the justice of its condemnation. The temple of Jerusalem was

⁴ The time of gathering figs. If this season had been over, the finding no fruit would not have proved the barrenness of the tree ; it might have been gathered. *He found nothing but leaves*, and this was a proof that the tree was barren, *for the time of figs was not yet* ; they had not been gathered. See Bloomfield, *Recensio Critica*.

⁵ See Isaiah lvi. 7.

the great depository of the worship of God ; of the true God. " In Jewry was God known ; in Salem was his tabernacle." And here the pretence of the worship of God was kept up. Here was a show of leaves, but no fruit ; here was the pretence, but not the reality of prayer.

And nothing could be more injurious to the Divine honour. Suppose a Gentile who had learnt from the Jewish Scriptures the being and unity of God ; who " had joined himself to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servant ;" ⁶ suppose him to have visited Jerusalem, for the purpose of fulfilling the duties of his faith : like the chamberlain of the Ethiopian Candace, who, with the Scripture in his hand, had " come up to Jerusalem to worship." (Acts viii. 27.) What a disappointment to his feelings, and what a contrast to his expectations, would be the sight of this temple, in which the sacrifices which were to be offered on the altar, had been made a pretext for buying and selling ; for placing there the *tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves*. How disgusting and how injurious to his rising faith it would prove, to find that the business of profit and loss was pursued, and the tumult of worldly transactions continued even there, where most particularly the thoughts ought to be carried beyond this world, and lifted above it !

We cannot then wonder that the zeal of our Lord was excited ; that he saw it a fit opportunity to express vehement indignation against all who showed such a proof of the prevalence of this present world

⁶ See Isaiah lxvi. 6.

in their hearts beyond the love of God. And all, we see, were so struck with the justice of his feelings, as to offer no opposition to him. The scribes and chief priests, however, when they found *the people astonished at his doctrine, sought how they might destroy him*. His reproofs, instead of awakening them to repentance, roused them to more vehement enmity against Him, who, had they listened to him, would have softened their hearts, and restored them to the favour of that God in whom they “made their boast,” but whose temple they had so shamefully profaned.

Such is too often the course of the corrupt heart. The event will manifest the truth of what is written, “He that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”⁷

LECTURE CI.

POWER OF FAITH.—A FORGIVING SPIRIT ENJOINED.—THE SCRIBES AND ELDERS SELF-CONVICTED.

MARK xi. 20—33.

(Matt. xxi. 20—27.)

20. *And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots.*

21. *And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away.*

⁷ Prov. xxix. 1.

22. *And Jesus answering saith unto him, Have faith in God.*

23. *For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea ; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass ; he shall have whatsoever he saith.*

24. *Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*

By the example before their eyes, of the fig-tree withered, our Lord takes the opportunity of pointing out the efficacy of faith, and of the prayer which is offered in faith. As much as to say, You seem surprised that the fig-tree is soon withered away. The same power which has blasted the fig-tree, shall be committed to yourselves. Only believe, "all things are possible to him that believeth."

On the strength of this promise, the apostles, to whom it was given, said confidently to the cripple who had been lame from his birth, (Acts iii. 6,) "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Peter spake, *not doubting in his heart, but believing that he should receive ;* and he was not disappointed. The cripple "leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God."

It is obvious that this promise, in its full and literal sense, was confined to the apostles ; confined to the time, which required evident and striking miracles as a testimony to the divinity of him from whom the power proceeded.

St. John, however, writing fifty years afterwards, when the power of working miracles was gradually

declining, likewise speaks of the prayer of faith. The limit to which he confines its power, makes the promise applicable to every age. "This is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask any thing *according to his will*, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." ¹

Such a measure of wisdom was given to the apostles, that they could not ask except *according to the will of God*. Succeeding Christians must limit their petitions to "what may be expedient for them."

Then follows a precept which belongs to all ages and persons.

25. *And when ye stand praying, forgive if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*

26. *But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.*

There must be a right spirit in the heart which offers prayer; otherwise, let no man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. Our reason and our conscience must subscribe to the just declaration of the prophet, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." ² There may be much remaining corruption in the heart, which makes acceptable prayer; but there must be no iniquity reigning and prevailing. Therefore *when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any*. Forgiveness is an essential part of the christian spirit. The parable of the unmerciful servant, (Matt. xviii. 33,) is expressly introduced to show, that harshness in resenting the errors of others, or

¹ 1 John v. 14.

² Ps. lxvi. 18.

the offence committed against ourselves, must betray a temper wholly inconsistent with christian faith. "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" The Christian is one who lives by mercy; and who cannot be spiritually alive at all, if he is not habitually sensible of this. Therefore he must habitually show mercy, and feel compassion.

(Luke xx. 1—8.)

27. *And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders,*

28. *And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?*

29. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.*

30. *The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me.*

31. *And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him?*

32. *But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed.*

33. *And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.*

The men of that generation had received sufficient proof, by what authority Jesus *did these things*. So Nicodemus candidly acknowledged.³

³ John iii. 1.

What they wanted, was not evidence to convince, but a heart to believe. Our Lord, therefore, answers them, by referring to John the Baptist, whom *all men counted as a prophet indeed*. And John had testified of him. "Looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!"⁴ "This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me." If, therefore, they believed not John, neither would they believe Jesus, if he told them *by what authority he did these things*.

Indeed, how could he have satisfied them more fully than he had already exhibited his divine commission? His miracles had proved it: but they refused to admit that evidence. His doctrines proved it: for "he taught them as one having authority:" but they set the proof aside, saying, "Out of Galilee cometh no prophet." John's testimony had declared it: and if they acknowledged the mission of John to be from heaven, they should have received his testimony. Self-convicted, therefore, they were silent: and justified the awful sentence, "A wicked and perverse generation seeketh after a sign: but there shall no sign be given it, except the sign of the prophet Jonas."

We too have sufficient proof: nay, we doubt not, but confess, that truly Jesus "was the Son of God:" and by that authority did these things. Let us take heed, that we be not "barren nor unfruitful in this knowledge" and confession. A trying question might be asked of many; The gospel of Christ Jesus, *was it from heaven, or of men?*—If they

⁴ John i. 29.

should say, *Of men*, they would contradict their inward conviction. If they should say, *From heaven* ; why do they not believe him ? why do they not obey him ?

“ Lord, *we* believe.” Enable us to show our faith, by walking before thee in righteousness and holiness.

LECTURE CII.

PARABLE OF THE REBELLIOUS HUSBANDMEN.

MARK xii. 1—12.

(Matt. xxi. 33—45. Luke xx. 9—19.)

1. *And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.*

2. *And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard.*

3. *And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty.*

4. *And again he sent unto them another servant ; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled.*

5. *And again he sent another ; and him they killed, and many others ; beating some, and killing some.*

When the owner of uncultivated ground reclaims it, and prepares it for the use of the husbandman, his object is, to receive a portion of the returns ; his share of the produce, or its value. This parable

compares the design of God, in revealing himself of the Jewish nation, with the design of the owner of uncultivated land. He had “showed them what is good;” he had given them means and encouragement for performing it: and he “required of them to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God.” This is “the end of the commandment:” and these are the fruits which the heavenly husbandman demands from the vineyard which he has reclaimed by his law and watered by his Spirit.

The heart of every Christian is such a vineyard. Let him see that it is making a due return to its rightful owner.

The Lord of the vineyard is described as commissioning servants one after another *to receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard*. These servants are the prophets, whom God from time to time inspired, that they might call the Jewish nation to account, and reprove their disobedience. Isaiah was one; when he warned them, saying, (i. 2,) “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” We do not however find that any general repentance followed the mission of Isaiah: he was *sent empty away*:—and, in the end, was *shamefully handled and killed*.¹ So, again, “the word that came to Jeremiah from

¹ As is thought, by Manasseh, in the first year of his reign.

the Lord, saying, (xi. 1—4,) Hear ye the words of this covenant, and speak unto the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem ; and say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel ; Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt.” But he also, instead of *receiving of the fruit of the vineyard*, proved the obstinacy of the husbandmen : *at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled*. He announced, as he had been enjoined to announce, the approaching destruction of this rebellious city, (xxxviii. 3, 6,) “Thus saith the Lord, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon’s army, which shall take it.” “Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon that was in the court of the prison : and they let down Jeremiah with cords : so Jeremiah sunk in the mire.”

Thus persecuted they the prophets. “Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity : they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger !”²

Still God will “reason” with them, before he proceeds to judgment.

6. *Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.*

7. *But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir ; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be our’s.*

8. *And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.*

² Is. i. 4.

9. *What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.*

10. *And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner:*

11. *This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?*

12. *And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.*

They might well know that *he had spoken the parable against them*: it described them too truly to be mistaken: it convinced their understandings, and struck home to their consciences; but it did not affect their hearts. *They sought to lay hands on him.* They took no pains to avert the just and sure conclusion, *The Lord of the vineyard will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard to others.* And accordingly, not forty years after this was spoken, the husbandmen were miserably destroyed: not one stone of the city was left upon another. And *the vineyard was given unto others* which should “render the fruits in their seasons.” The apostle proclaimed to his disobedient countrymen, “Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”³

Many, indeed, of these rejoiced to hear it, and received the word gladly. And we acknowledge with gratitude, that the vineyard, no longer confined within the narrow limits of Judea, has enlarged its borders to “the uttermost parts of the

³ Acts xxviii. 28.

earth," and husbandmen from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, have been sent into it, and have rendered the fruits of righteousness to *the Lord of the vineyard*. And some of these fruits, we trust, are returned to him from our own land.

Still, when we think of the words, *They will reverence my son*; when we consider the just grounds of that expectation; and when we compare these with the event: there is great room for humiliation in this and in every christian country. Men indeed do outwardly and nominally revere the name of Jesus, and profess to call him Lord and Saviour. But how few really love, or serve, or honour, or obey him!

We may judge of this from one point, which can hardly be disputed. Christ himself, before he left the world, appointed an ordinance by which it might be seen, in after times, in what value he was held. He commanded his disciples to break bread as his body was broken, and to pour out wine as his blood was poured out, and to eat and drink the bread and wine in a solemn ceremony, to remind us that our souls must be nourished by the spiritual food of his body and blood, as our bodies are supported by natural food. "This do," he said, "in remembrance of me." And might he not suppose, *They will reverence my command*? Were we then to judge of the number who indeed reverence him, by the number who observe this memorial of what he has done for men, what conclusion must we reasonably form? For if they were indeed reverencing Christ as he de-

serves to be revered ; if they were trusting to the atonement which he made, and looking to be cleansed from sin by his blood ; if they were depending upon his grace to purify their hearts, and enable them to “work out their salvation :” it appears impossible that they should refuse to kneel at his altar, in remembrance of his sufferings, and entreat his Spirit to complete in them the good work which He has begun.

When, therefore, we find almost all that are young, and a vast proportion of those who have reached riper years, habitually neglecting this ordinance, are we not obliged to own, that whatever others do, these do *not* reverence the Son of God ? And when we consider how large a number of the husbandmen are thus deficient, can we think that the just expectations of God are answered, *They will reverence my Son ?*

Alas ! the hearts of men were but too well understood by him who said, “Many are called, but few are chosen.”

Whether, however, they be many or few, who so reverence the Son of God as to show that they are looking to him for salvation, let it be our diligent concern, that we be among the number. Whether there be “many that shall be saved,” or few, the death of Christ is an all-sufficient sacrifice, and “God willeth not that any should perish.” *Hereafter*, “many shall seek to enter in” to the heavenly kingdom, “and shall not be able.” But *now* is the promise given, “whosoever will, let him take of the waters of life freely.”

LECTURE CIII.

ALLEGIANCE DUE TO CÆSAR AND TO GOD.
THE RESURRECTION.

MARK xii. 13—27.

(Matt. xxii. 15—33. Luke xx. 20—38.)

13. *And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.*

14. *And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not ?¹*

15. *Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it.*

16. *And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Cæsar's.*

17. *And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.*

It was not our Lord's business to decide, whether Cæsar had a right to exercise authority in Judea. But it was a strong presumption in his favour, that his coin circulated in the land.

This, however, was a fit occasion for issuing a

¹ Some of the Pharisees argued that this was not law, on the principle, "We be Abraham's children, and were never in bondage to any man." We have no king but God. The Herodians, probably, as followers of Herod, took the opposite side.

general precept. *Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.* He who bears sovereignty in a land, has a claim to allegiance, and to tribute as a part of allegiance. And St. Paul declares the grounds on which this duty rests. (Rom. xiii. 1, &c.) "The powers that be are ordained of God." "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God;" whose will it is, for the maintenance of peace and quietness, that power and authority should be delegated to some, for the security of the whole. Christians are, in the most important sense, free; and they are often reminded of this by the apostles: they are "the Lord's free-men;" and they are free from many tyrants to which the rest of the world is in slavery. But they are also as constantly reminded, that this spiritual freedom does not exempt them from due subordination to kings and magistrates and all in authority; to these they are to "submit themselves for the Lord's sake."² Not to "use their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness," which would sufficiently prove them not to be "servants of God."

All this is implied in the sentence, *Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.*

But it was a fit occasion to inculcate another duty. *Render to God the things that are God's.* He had a certain claim to their obedience. Their coin bore the image and superscription of Cæsar. But their country bore the image and superscription of God. His name was written upon their nation. He had chosen them to be a peculiar people: he had given them his laws, and prescribed

² See 1 Pet. ii. 13, &c.

their ordinances; he had supported, instructed, protected them; and in return, they were to pay him the honour and service which he demanded; they were to love the Lord their God with all their heart and all their soul and all their mind.

This sentence, therefore, was well suited to convict and humble them. *Render to God the things that are God's.* Does it condemn us also?

If the kings of this world have a right to allegiance, much more has He, who is King of kings, and Lord of lords. Yet might not a prophet still remonstrate in the words of Malachi, (i. 6,) "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?"

One tribute is especially due to God, which if it be rendered, will lead to all the rest. "God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it." He has separated for himself the seventh part of time, as that which is to be reserved from worldly business and exempted from ordinary labour, and devoted to Himself. "Will a man rob God?" Yet too often does he "rob God," misapplying to common and secular purposes the day which God has hallowed as his own.

Still the Sabbath is spoken of by the prophets in language which cannot be misunderstood. (Isaiah lviii. 13.) "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt

thou delight thyself in the Lord.” The argument implied in this passage is unalterable; not limited to man under the Jewish dispensation as the disciple of Moses, but belonging to man as the creature of God. The Sabbath is his *holy day*. The heathen have lost the knowledge of this. But we know it, to whom his word is revealed. And therefore we are to *honour* him, by removing from us, as far as possible, whatever may tend to make the day less “holy of the Lord;” whatever might interfere with his worship or divert our thoughts from him: we are not to *do our own ways, or find our own pleasure, or speak our own words*; but to turn our words to his glory, to find pleasure in his service, and to direct our ways to the places where he has “recorded his name.”

And as the reasons are of universal application, so also is the reward of this duty. *Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord*. This obedience to the command of God, this conformity to his will, shall be recompensed by that increasing love of Him which is the highest dignity of man, and which his Spirit alone can shed abroad in the heart. That service, which may have had its beginning in obedience, in a desire to render unto God his own, shall be continued in love, and shall terminate in glory. For “blessed is the man that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it.” The experience of every country, and every family, and every individual, furnishes proof that this blessing was not limited to Judea, and was not cancelled together with the law of Moses.

Let every one, therefore, study in his practice the

spirit of Isaiah's words, and, considering the seventh day as the property of God, *render unto God his own.*

18. *Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection ; and they asked him, saying,*

19. *Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.*

20. *Now there were seven brethren : and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed.*

21. *And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed : and the third likewise.*

22. *And the seven had her, and left no seed : last of all the woman died also.*

23. *In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them ? for the seven had her to wife.*

24. *And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God ?*

25. *For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage ; but are as the angels which are in heaven.*

26. *And as touching the dead, that they rise : have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ?*

27. *He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living : ye therefore do greatly err.*

How inspiring is the prospect thus opened to our minds, and, if we continue steadfast unto the end, to our hopes ! *When they shall rise from the dead, they are as the angels which are in heaven.*

And this thought suggests another, connected

with the subject of the Sabbath. The angels which are in heaven, are “ministering spirits,” standing before the throne of God to fulfil his will. And it may well be a question for those who do not feel the Sabbath to be “a delight, holy of the Lord, and honourable;” if they cannot devote their thoughts to God here for a single day, how will they bear his presence for eternity? If one day in his service is a task too burthensome to be endured, how will they be fit to surround his throne for ever, and “serve him day and night in his temple?”

Therefore was the Sabbath graciously given as a preparation for an eternal Sabbath, when “the people of God” shall rest from their earthly labours, and be *as the angels which are in heaven.*

LECTURE CIV.

LOVE OF GOD.

MARK xii. 28—34.

28. *And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?*

29. *And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:*

30. *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength : this is the first commandment.*

31. *And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*

32. *And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth : for there is one God ; and there is none other but he :*

33. *And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*

34. *And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.*

One of the first approaches to the kingdom of God, is a candid acknowledgment of the truth : when the conscience recognizes that “the commandment is holy, and just, and good,” and does not revolt and rebel. It was a sign that the light of moral judgment was not extinguished in David by his long continuance in transgression, when he replied to Nathan’s parable, “The man who has done this thing shall surely die.” So likewise when our Lord set before the Jews the conduct of the rebellious husbandmen, and they confessed that the lord of the vineyard might justly “come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others ;”¹ this reply was the light of reason still glimmering in their hearts. And we might be ready to say of such, *T’hou art not far from the kingdom of God.*

¹ See Matt. xxi. 41.

It is, however, too true, that a man may be not far from the kingdom of God, and yet never come nigher to it. There is a great gulf, which is too often never passed, between a convinced conscience and a converted heart. We may see the truth and own it, yet never act upon it. The Jews, for instance, in the case just now adverted to, when they perceived the parable to be directed against them, instead of repenting, and receiving him whom God had sent, sought the more to lay hold on him and destroy him. The lawyer who had been reminded, like the scribe here, of what was written in the law,² “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself;” did not proceed to answer, *Well, Master, thou hast said the truth*;—but was “willing to justify himself, and asked, Who is my neighbour?”

David, on the other hand, when the prophet pursued his subject, and showed to him further, “Thou art the man,” dared not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but confessed and denied not, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And so the scribe in this dialogue. *To love God with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.* He admits the truth. He suggests none of those objections which men too often interpose against the practical love of God or our neighbour. He does not ask, “And who is my neighbour?” where is my bounty to begin or end? Neither does he say, How can I love God,

² See Luke x. 27.

countrymen were so slow to understand ; and confesses that *to love God with all the heart, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*

So when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.

His clear perception, and his unreserved confession of a truth so often concealed, appeared to indicate that “honest and good heart” which “having heard the word, keeps it;” and might therefore be permitted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God : might be led onward to a fuller and more complete acquaintance with God through the Son. For it is this knowledge, the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, which brings all the faculties of the soul, which brings *all the heart, and all the understanding*, to unite in love towards Him. Love exercised towards ourselves, is of all things the most likely to produce a return of love. And we have indeed this strongest reason to love God : He loved us. He loved the world, even the corrupt, rebellious world, which “did not like to retain him in its knowledge.” Nay, he so loved the world, that when there was no other way in which his attributes could be maintained in unison, and his mercy and his justice meet together, he sent his only Son, —even him whom the Pharisees and the Herodians were now tempting, and the scribes questioning—that all who believe in him might not perish, but have eternal life. Justly then does the apostle say, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation

for our sins.” And justly he goes on to add, “ We love him, because he first loved us.” So indeed it ought to be : so it must be, if we have any sense of this inestimable mercy. He first loved us. He gave this great and wonderful evidence of his love. And now he demands our love in return. He requires us to feel that, which it is the highest privilege and glory of our nature to be able to feel.

But only the renewed nature can feel it. “ The carnal heart is enmity against God.” The love of God does not flow out of our hearts naturally, but must be “ shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” Implore him to send that Spirit more and more ; and to add to his other gifts this crown of them all, that we may be enabled to love him *with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength.*

LECTURE CV.

JESUS PROVES HIMSELF TO BE MORE THAN THE SON OF DAVID.—REBUKES THE VANITY AND HYPOCRISY OF THE SCRIBES.—COMMENDS THE POOR WIDOW, WHO CAST HER ALL INTO THE TREASURY.

MARK xii. 35—44.

(Matt. xxii. 41—46. Luke xx. 41—43.)

35. *And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David ?*

36. *For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.*

37. *David therefore himself calleth him Lord ; and whence is he then his son ? And the common people heard him gladly.*

It had been foretold in one of the clearest prophecies respecting the Messiah, that he should be *the Son of David*. (Is. xi. 1.) “There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots : and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.” But the Pharisees are here instructed, and required to observe, that although Christ was indeed the Son of David according to the flesh, he was also to be something more. Or how should David, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, bestow on him a

divine title, rather than that which might be expected from a father to his son ?

As he argued thus, *the common people heard him gladly*. He spoke in a language which reached their understandings, and appealed to their consciences, and its effect was not counteracted by prejudice and private interests. But, alas ! there are many, who, though, when they hear the word, they receive it with joy, have no root in themselves ; are “hearers only,” and never set themselves in earnest to “patient continuance in well doing.”

(Matt. xxiii. 1—7. Luke xx. 45—47.)

38. *And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the market places,*

39. *And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts :*

40. *Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers : these shall receive greater damnation.*

It was manifest concerning these, that they could not be safe teachers or expounders of the law. They were of the world, worldly : and “if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Their affections were set on things of the earth ; on honour, and personal respect, and gain ; not on godliness. How, therefore, could they lead others to godliness ?

These, says our Lord, shall receive greater condemnation. Because to pride, which is a disposition so unsuitable to man ; and to injustice and extortion, crimes against which the anger of God is peculiarly denounced in the prophets ; they added hypocrisy : *for a pretence they made long prayers :*

they were witnesses against themselves that they owed an allegiance to God, which, notwithstanding, they did not observe. To sin ignorantly, is a grievous evil: but it is of still more awful consequence, to know the Lord's will and do it not. "Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law, dishonourest thou God?"

(Luke xxi. 2—4.)

41. *And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.*

42. *And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.*

43. *And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:*

44. *For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.*

This example brings before our minds with great force a very solemn reflection. It admonishes us of the way in which the King of all the earth is constantly beholding the works of men, and recording them for reward or condemnation. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."¹ Beholding the evil, sometimes that he may over-rule their bad designs to his own wise purposes; and sometimes that he may restrain them within the bounds which they should not pass, lest, like the waters of the deluge, they should return to cover the earth: and in the end, that he may "give to every man according to his ways,

¹ Prov. xv. 3.

and according to the fruit of his doings.”² Why he beholds the good, it is needless to declare. For the same purpose that our Lord noticed *this poor widow*. That he may approve and favour now, and give abundant recompence hereafter.

Let us strive to bear in mind that He is always beholding us; that he “compasseth our path, and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways.”

But, to return to the scene before us, let us consider what our Lord, who knew the heart, might too probably observe when he beheld the people as they *cast money into the treasury*.

What was so cast in, was employed for the relief of the indigent, and for the repair and ornament of the temple. It was expected that all should contribute to these purposes according to their ability. One might, therefore, be seen giving, not cheerfully, but of necessity; according as his station, or the example of others, obliged him. “Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.” Another might be seen giving, with a liberal hand, but not from a liberal motive; that he might be “seen of men,” and be extolled for his generosity. He “has his reward;” but he has it on earth, where he seeks it, where his heart is, and his treasure is. But others would be seen, like this poor widow, *casting more in, than they all*: casting in, not of their abundance, but of their poverty. The Lord would rejoice to see it, foreknowing her recompence hereafter. She had done it in faith,

casting her care upon God ; and great would be her reward in heaven.

The example, and the commendation bestowed upon it, speak loudly to all, “Go, and do thou likewise.”

LECTURE CVI.

THE APOSTLES INSTRUCTED AND WARNED CONCERNING PERSECUTION AND THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

MARK xiii. 1—23.

(Matt. xxiv. 1—29. Luke xxi. 5—27.)

1. *And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here !*

2. *And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings ? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

3. *And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately,*

4. *Tell us, when shall these things be ? And what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled ?*

5. *And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you :*

6. *For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ ; and shall deceive many.*

7. *And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled : for such things must needs be ; but the end shall not be yet.*

8. *For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom : and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles : these are the beginnings of sorrows.*

9. *But take heed to yourselves : for they shall deliver you up to councils ; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten : and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.*

10. *And the gospel must first be published among all nations.*

11. *But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate : but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye : for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.*

12. *Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son ; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.*

13. *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake : but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

Jesus had been led by the remark of *one of his disciples*, admiring the buildings of the temple, to speak openly of its destruction. He had often alluded to it, but now he spoke in a manner that could not be mistaken. So they *ask him privately, when shall these things be?* Expecting, perhaps, that they should immediately succeed and avenge his death. He undeceives them, and warns them of a fearful interval, which the counsels of God required. An interval when *nation should rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom :* when there should be *earthquakes, and famines, and troubles.* In the midst of these tumults, *the*

gospel should be published among all nations. But those to whom its promulgation was entrusted, must not expect a kind welcome, or an easy acceptance of their mission : they should be *delivered up to councils, and beaten in the synagogues, and brought before rulers and kings.*

To be warned of dangers and difficulties like these, would naturally have the effect of alarming the apostles. They might justly have considered their own weakness : like Moses, who, with the evidence of divine power strong before his eyes, still shrunk from the office assigned him :¹ and “said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt ?” It was needful that he should be strengthened and supported by the promise, “Certainly I will be with thee.” In the same manner the apostles, whilst they are forewarned of danger, are assured of succour and of strength proportioned to their exigency. You shall be brought before councils, and rulers, and kings : you might reasonably be anxious what you should speak, being “unlearned and ignorant men :” but *take no thought beforehand, neither do ye premeditate ; but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye ; for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.*

So, when family should be divided against family ; when *brother should betray the brother, the father the son, and the children should rise up against the parents,* and when they should be hated of all men for Christ’s sake : there was danger of

¹ Exod. iii. 2.

their supposing themselves neglected of God, and forsaken. It was needful that they should be guarded against this natural, though groundless, fear: and be assured, *he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

There are those who receive the word with joy, “but when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by they are offended.” St. Paul was on this account apprehensive about his Thessalonian converts: (1 Thess. iii. 2 :) and expressly sent Timotheus to establish them, and comfort them concerning their faith: “that no man should be moved by these afflictions: for ye yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.”

These Thessalonians had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.” Their first expectation would be, that such conversion would be rewarded with the immediate favour and regard of God. The Jews had been particularly accustomed to consider temporal blessings as the consequence of obedience; and the heathens, no less, expected that the deities which they worshipped should watch over and defend them. Hence the necessity of warning all beforehand, that their faith should be tried by persecution: that “glory, and honour, and immortality,” were reserved as the reward of “patient continuance in well doing:” and that in the midst of a wintry season of judgment and tribulation, the seed of the gospel should take root,

and derive fresh vigour from the enmity and opposition which were intended to destroy it.

There was no design, therefore, that the Christians, as Christians, should be exempt from persecution. But it was designed, that they should be preserved from the calamities prepared for the Jews who persecuted them. Therefore a salutary warning follows, by attending to which the Christians might escape, and in fact did escape, the miseries attendant upon the destruction of Jerusalem.

14. *But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation,² spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judea flee to the mountains :*

15. *And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house :*

16. *And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment.*

17. *But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days !³*

18. *And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter.*

19. *For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.*

20. *And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved :⁴ but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.*

² Dan. ix. 27. When ye shall see the abomination of a heathen army encamped about the sacred city.

³ To whom flight would be impossible or difficult.

⁴ i. e. The whole Jewish nation would be exterminated. But it is the will of God, that a remnant of his elect people should survive.

21. *And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ ; or, Lo, he is there ;⁵ believe him not :*

22. *For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.*

23. *But take ye heed : behold, I have foretold you all things.*

The instruction here given, that the Christians might escape the vengeance coming upon Jerusalem, is equally applicable to the preparation which all require, that they may be able to “stand before the Son of man” at his appearing.

Their treasure in the house, their business in the field, were to be alike deserted, lest, while they attended to these, the enemy should enter, and they be taken by surprise. And woe to those whom domestic cares should entangle and impede !

So let nothing delay a man from preparing to meet his God. Let no business, no pleasures, no public or private duties, induce him to wait for a more “convenient season,” if he is not at the present moment living in the faith of Christ. Whilst he is otherwise employed, life is wearing, and judgment drawing near. “They that are ready,” when the bridegroom cometh, “go in unto the marriage : and the door is shut.” And the Lord has plainly said, *Take ye heed ; behold, I have foretold you all things.*

⁵ The Messiah is appearing to deliver us.

LECTURE CVII.

AWFUL DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.—WATCHFULNESS ENJOINED.

MARK xiii. 24—37.

(Matt. xxiv. 29—51. Luke xxi. 28—36.)

24. *But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light,*

25. *And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken.*

26. *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.*

27. *And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.*

28. *Now learn a parable of the fig-tree: When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near:*

29. *So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors.*

30. *Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.*

31. *Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my word shall not pass away.*

32. *But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.*

Under the image of the falling of the sun and moon, and the shaking of the powers of heaven, the total destruction of Jerusalem is foretold, and the removal of the Divine presence from that rebellious

city. The sun had shone there with a brightness elsewhere unknown : the light of revelation had given its inhabitants a knowledge of God, and instructed them in his will. But now *the sun should be darkened, and the moon should not give her light* ; the law in which they made their boast was superseded ; the “ oracles of God ” were no longer committed to their care. They should see the truth of Christ’s words confirmed ; they should *see the Son of man coming in clouds of vengeance*, to “ burn up the city ” which would not have Him to reign over it ; and *they shall see him coming*, not only in the power of a conqueror, but in the glory of a king, to rule over a willing people who hear and obey his word. *He shall send his angels*, his apostles and evangelists, who *shall gather from the uttermost parts of the earth*, “ a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people,” redeemed from iniquity, zealous of good works, and waiting for a heavenly kingdom.

All this should happen at the appointed time. They were to expect it, when they saw the first appearance of the signs which he had revealed, as *the leaves put forth from the tender branch* betoken the approach of summer. And many of that generation, many living when these words were uttered, should survive to witness their truth. So it proved : within forty years the temple was destroyed, the city was laid waste, the people perished, or were carried off as captives ; the law ceased to be observed ; and they who had been “ aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and without God in the world,” were gathered together into a holy catholic

church, “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.”¹

With no less certainty shall another event take place, of which the terms of the description here are doubtless intended to remind us. (2 Pet. iii. 10.) “The day of the Lord will come, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.” “Then the Son of man shall send his angels, and gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity :” and *shall gather together his elect*, those who have received him and believed in his name, *from the four winds, from the uttermost parts of the earth* ; that where he is, they may be for ever.

We look for these things. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. “What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness ?”

The apostles would naturally desire to ask, when these events would take place. What would be the time “of his coming, and of the end of the world.”

But of that day and hour, either when the judgments of God should fall upon Jerusalem, or when all mankind should be summoned to their great account, God did not see fit to make precise revelation. It is among “the secret things which belong to the Lord our God ;” *which knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son*—as a fact which he was commissioned to re-

¹ See Eph. ii. 11—22.

veal—but *the Father*.² We are assured that it will happen. And to be prepared whenever it happens, this is the trial of faith.

Our Lord proceeds to illustrate this by example.

33. *Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.*

34. *For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded his porter to watch.*

35. *Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning:*

36. *Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.*

37. *And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.*

The absence of the master is the test of the servant's fidelity. That servant is ready and watching, who is at his post; who is not afraid to meet his lord; who has not behaved during his lord's absence, as if he was never to return; but has diligently performed the work assigned him; has guarded the house faithfully, and kept out robbers and enemies.

It has pleased God that the faith of Christians should be put to a like trial. "Behold, I come

² The turn of the sentence would imply, that *that day and hour* were actually unknown to *the Son*. But "He and his Father are one." He "was with God in the beginning, and was God." We cannot, therefore, suppose that he was not partaker of the Father's counsels, either as to the destruction of Jerusalem or the end of the world. It is said that, in the same way as, confessedly, when he came in our nature, he divested himself of *immortality*, which he possessed as God; so he might also divest himself of *knowledge*. This is hard to understand. It would be strange, however, if there were not difficulties in a case so mysterious as the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ.

quickly, and my reward is with me ;” “ indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish to every soul of man that doeth evil ; eternal life to them, who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality.”^a And the Christian will be found watching, who acts as if he believed this. He holds himself prepared. He expected death, whilst in health : and has not, at the last hour, his worldly affairs and his eternal concerns to settle, when he is fit for nothing but to sigh and complain. He does not lament, as Ahab to the prophet, “ Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ?” but he receives the summons of death, as the call of the Saviour whom he has long trusted and obeyed, and says, “ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.” He is conscious, without doubt, of many sins and infirmities, which though he has struggled against them, (for that is the work appointed him,) have yet remained and harassed him unto the end. But he has learnt, and taken it to heart, that “ there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus ;” that “ his blood cleanseth from all sin” those who have believed in his name. In his Lord’s absence, the enemy, the enemy of our souls, has often assailed the house ; but through the strength of his Lord he has repelled them. Satan has never got dominion there ; he has sought admittance, and perhaps been listened to for a while, but he has never finally prevailed.

Such a servant is prepared ; whenever *the master of the house cometh*, he will not be *found sleeping* ;

^a See Rom. ii. 6—10.

and it is a happy summons, which calls him to his everlasting rest.

Watch ye, therefore ; watch and pray : for ye know not when the time is.

LECTURE CVIII.

MARY ANOINTS THE HEAD OF JESUS.
JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES EAT THE PASSOVER.

MARK xiv. 1—25.

(Matt. xxvi. 1—13. John xii. 1—7.)

1. *After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread : and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death.*

2. *But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.*

3. *And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious ; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.¹*

4. *And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made ?*

5. *For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence,² and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.*

¹ This was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. See John xiii. 3.

² About 9*l.* 13*s.* 9*d.* of our money.

6. *And Jesus said, Let her alone ; why trouble ye her ? she hath wrought a good work on me.*

7. *For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good : but me ye have not always.*

8. *She hath done what she could : she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.*

9. *Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.*

This memorial is not left for her sake, but for ours, that we may know the spirit which our Lord approves in his disciples. Here, as in the case of the poor widow lately, who cast her all into the treasury, he applauds the act, because he approves the motive. She acted in faith. Mary, here, in love. On the principles too current in the world, each might have censure. The one might be called rash ; Mary is accused as wasteful. But he who knows the heart, bestows his approbation. *Why trouble ye her ? she hath wrought a good work on me ?* And the same approbation he will bestow at a season when nothing else will be valued or valuable. He will bestow it on all who have “loved much, because they have been much forgiven,” and have felt that the author of their pardon is “precious” to their souls.

(Matt. xxvi. 14—25. Luke xxii. 3—34. John xiii. 1—30.)

10. *And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them.*

11. *And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him.*

12. *And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover ?*

13. *And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water : follow him.*

14. *And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the good man of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples ?*

15. *And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared : there make ready for us.*

16. *And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them : and they made ready the passover.*

17. *And in the evening he cometh with the twelve.*

18. *And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you that eateth with me shall betray me.*

19. *And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I ? and another said, Is it I ?*

20. *And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish.*

21. *The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him : but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed ! good were it for that man if he had never been born.*

22. *And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take eat : this is my body.*

23. *And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them : and they all drank of it.*

24. *And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new Testament,³ which is shed for many.*

25. *Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.*

The present was a time of affliction. Our Lord looks beyond the present, to that joy which was to

³ The New Testament, or Covenant, which, like the first, "was not dedicated without blood." See Heb. ix. 18, &c.

be purchased by it: ("joy as of them that joy in harvest," when the vintage is finished and the "new wine" made:)⁴ when those who were now wearied, afflicted, and persecuted, should "sit down in the kingdom of God." The solemn festival which he was now celebrating with those who had "been with him in his temptations," whom "he loved unto the end," reminds him of the day when he should welcome them to a very different scene, where there should be no more sorrow or pain, and "God should wipe away all tears from their eyes."

It was the prospect of this sublime gratification which caused the Son of God to come in our nature, and to endure the death which he was now on the point of suffering. "For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame." For the joy set before him. And what was that joy, but the joy of "bringing many sons to glory?"⁵ This was the fruit "of the travail of his soul," which the predicted Messiah was to "see," and be satisfied with seeing. And the thought of this occurs to cheer him now, when that travail was about to be undergone. "Ye now, therefore, have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." Now, there is to all a season of affliction. Hereafter shall be a season of festivity, when "the ransomed" and their Deliverer shall meet together, and those whom God hath given him, shall "re-

⁴ See the same metaphor; Amos ix. 13; Zeph. iii. 17; Joel iii. 18; Zech. ix. 17.

⁵ Heb. ii. 10.

ceive the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world." Then they shall fully understand the extent of his mercy and love. They shall know what he has saved them from suffering: they shall know what he has brought them to enjoy.

The image contained in the word *ransom* may furnish an illustration. We can suppose a party surprised by enemies, or conquered like the inhabitants of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, when "all the princes and the mighty of the land were carried into captivity to Babylon."⁶ We can suppose a benefactor, in pity for their condition, to have expended his fortune in redeeming these from their conquerors, and to have restored them to their native land, their homes, their families. The highest recompence which such a benefactor could enjoy, would be to behold these replaced in the possession of all that was dear to them, to hear their expressions of gratitude, to witness their happiness, enhanced by the fears and miseries they had undergone.

Now, if we add to the thought here suggested, the idea of Infinity and Eternity: if we consider the misery escaped as infinite and eternal, and the happiness bestowed as infinite and eternal; we may form some notion (though but a feeble one) of the season which was present to our Lord's mind, when he should *drink of the fruit of the vine new with his disciples in the kingdom of God*.

Among other lessons here to be learnt, this must not be forgotten. Those who were to drink

⁶ 2 Kings xxiv.

of the new wine in the heavenly kingdom, partook of the cup which he drank of here. They partook with him, at this feast of the passover, of the cup of love and fidelity. They constantly drank of the cup of humiliation and self-denial. So must his disciples in the world. They must be ready to follow his example through any trials, and to obey his precepts through any sacrifices.

And can we suppose, that those, who are indeed faithful to him, will hesitate to drink likewise of that cup which is the emblem of his blood shed for them, and which he has enjoined them to “drink in remembrance of him?” If any do hesitate, let them examine and prove themselves; they have a manifest sign that all is not right with their souls.

LECTURE CIX.

THE AGONY OF JESUS AT GETHSEMANE.
WATCHFULNESS AND PRAYER ENJOINED.

MARK xiv. 26—52.

(Matt. xxvii. 30—56. Luke xxii. 39—53. John xviii. 1—44.)

26. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

27. *And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.¹*

¹ Zech. xiii. 7.

28. *But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.*²

29. *But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.*

30. *And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.*

31. *But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.*

32. *And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray.*

33. *And he taketh with him Peter and James and John,³ and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy;*

34. *And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch.*

35. *And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.*

36. *And he said, Abba, Father, All things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.*

We are taught by this affecting passage, that a season of special emergency from danger foreseen, or approaching trial, is a fit season for special prayer. Few occasions in our Saviour's life are more suited for our comfort or imitation. Here we contemplate him, in his human nature, ex-

² Keeping up the metaphor of *the shepherd*, our Lord says, *I will go before you into Galilee.* I will lead you, and you shall follow me thither. "My sheep hear my voice, and *they* follow me."

³ It will be remembered that these had also been his particular companions at other seasons; and recently, at his transfiguration.

erting no divine power:—for “how then shall the Scripture be fulfilled?” We see him, as man, contending against the foreknowledge of bitter suffering, against all that our nature most shrinks from: and we see him, not supported, as many of his disciples have since been in similar trials, by a strength beyond their own, but left, as it appears, to experience all the bitterness of unmitigated anguish. No doubt, for a purpose: that we, for whose instruction it is recorded, may be convinced of the reality of that misery which awaits unrepented, unpardoned sin. The prayer which he utters is of all things most calculated to convince us of that reality. *Abba, Father, if it be possible*: if it be possible that sin can be remitted without the actual payment of this its penalty; or can be remedied without this display of its consequences;—*take away this cup from me*: let me return in peace to thy bosom, or taste a death more like the ordinary dissolution of the human frame.

It was not possible. The Father’s silence answers that it were not possible. The Son’s consent implies that it were not possible. *Nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt. It is enough: the hour is come*; “for this cause came I into the world.” Let that be done, which best agrees with thy counsels, and will most effectually promote thy glory, and fulfil the great purpose of my Incarnation.

Here then is an unanswerable reply to the unbelief of men, as to the inevitable result of sin. Apply to the further suffering of the impenitent transgressor, what here belongs to the suffering of Christ. *If it be possible*, that he can enjoy an eter-

nity of happiness, or escape an eternity of misery—*let the cup of divine wrath and indignation pass from him.* This history proves (whoso readeth, let him understand) that it cannot be; that “the wages of sin is death;” and that its recompence must be actually rendered, its consequences really undergone.

37. *And he cometh and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?*

38. *Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.*

39. *And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words.*

40. *And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him.*

41. *And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.*

42. *Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand.*

43. *And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.*

44. *And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely.*

45. *And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed him.*

46. *And they laid their hands on him, and took him.*

47. *And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high-priest, and cut off his ear.⁴*

⁴ St. John acquaints us, that this was Simon Peter. John viii. 10.

48. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me ?*

49. *I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not : but the scriptures must be fulfilled.*

50. *And they all forsook him, and fled.*

51. *And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body : and the young men laid hold on him.*

52. *And he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.^s*

Among the many things which might be attended to in this passage, we will fix on one : on the advice and warning given by our Lord to his disciples before they entered on the approaching scene of trial. From the agony of his own prayer, *he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and said unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou ? Couldst not thou watch with me one hour ? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.* This he said, foreknowing, what they did not equally understand, the temptation to which they would be exposed, and forewarning them that they could only be enabled to overcome such difficulties, by habitual prayer and watchfulness.

So that here a lesson is left for the Christian in all future ages. His *spirit is ready*. It is implied in his being an intelligent Christian, that his spirit is ready ; that he “consents to the law, that it is good ;” that he purposes to obey the will of God. But his spirit can hardly be more ready than that of

^s This circumstance seems to be related, to show the general confusion and alarm of the moment.

the disciples, who had all said, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee;" and one of whom *drew a sword* in his Master's defence, and, surrounded as they were, *smote a servant of the high-priest, and cut off his ear*. Yet there was still something within, which would render them unable to act according to their better purposes, and obey the dictate of their consciences when the trial came. *The flesh is weak*. So it appeared, too clearly, when *they all forsook him, and fled*; and when Peter afterwards denied that he had ever "known the man."

What is this but a picture of the broken resolutions and repeated transgressions, on which a Christian has too often reason to look back, and which, when it is too late, he laments in vain?

Therefore is he warned to *watch and pray, that he enter not into temptation*. In actual temptation, there is little opportunity for the exercise of those means by which men are enabled to overcome it. Prayer and watchfulness are the discipline by which they are made capable of resistance; capable of using their arms, when the enemy actually advances and the combat begins. In order to be prepared for that trial, they must use constant vigilance over the besetting sins of their state, habits, disposition: must foresee temptation, and habitually pray, that with it "a way be made to escape, that they may be able to bear it;" that in the hour of danger, such thoughts, such resolution, such inward strength may be supplied by the Spirit, as shall enable them to "withstand in the evil day."

"Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about

with truth, having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.”⁶

LECTURE CX.

JESUS IS ARRAIGNED BEFORE THE HIGH-PRIEST. PETER DENIES HIM.

MARK xiv. 53—72.

(Matt. xxvi. 57—75. Luke xxii. 54—61. John xviii. 15—27.)

53. *And they led Jesus away to the high-priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.*

54. *And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high-priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.*

55. *And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none.*

56. *For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together.*

57. *And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying,*

⁶ Eph. vi. 14—18.

58. *We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.*

59. *But neither so did their witness agree together.*

60. *And the high-priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?*

61. *But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high-priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*

62. *And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

63. *Then the high-priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?*

64. *Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.*

65. *And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.*

Thus did the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed. The whole proceedings are full of injustice, malice, and cruelty. False witnesses rose up against him, and laid to his charge things that he knew not. And when he affirmed the fact, that he was *the Christ, the Son of the Blessed*, the high-priest accused him of blasphemy. In what other words could he declare the truth? They might indeed have repeated the question put to him before, "What sign showest thou, that we may see and believe thee?"¹ And there was a ready answer, "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." But prejudice and hatred do not wait for reason. All the bad passions are here in full exercise: and we can-

¹ John vi. 30.

not wonder at the dreadful consequences by which the Son of man confirmed his truth and his divinity, and did *come with the right hand of power*, leading on the Roman army, and “miserably destroyed those wicked men, and burnt up their city.”

But such judgments are “his strange work.” His object is mercy and pity. Let us be wise in time, and secure on our side that power, which is intended not to consume men’s lives, but to save them.

66. *And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high-priest :*

67. *And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.*

68. *But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch ; and the cock crew.*

69. *And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them.*

70. *And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them : for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.*

71. *But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.*

72. *And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.*

We now see the force of our Lord’s previous warning : *Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.* Not long before, it had seemed impossible to Peter, that he should deny his attachment to his Lord. *Though I should die with thee,*

yet will I not deny thee. But now, seeing Jesus in the hands of enemies, and being surrounded by the high priest's servants, who would ridicule, at least, if not persecute, the disciple of one whose cause appeared so hopeless, he has not the courage to say, *I was one of them.* But he denied ;—denied again—denied with an oath, that he *knew the man of whom they spake.*

It may be asked, what could watchfulness and prayer have done for him, that he might have shown more faithfulness and resolution? WATCHFULNESS would have led him to foresee and provide against the very situation in which he was now placed. Jesus had forewarned them all, that he “must suffer many things, and be set at nought.” Peter should have meditated on this; have prepared his mind for acting on such an emergency; should have meditated on the proofs of power, and of truth, and of divinity, which he had seen; enough surely to convince him, that nothing could be done against Jesus which was not permitted from above. And, like his divine Master, he should have strengthened himself by PRAYER against this predicted season; have sought a supply of grace suited to its difficulty; that knowing these things, he should act as if he knew them. Thus when he was questioned, *And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth,* the reply might have been suggested to him,—All this which seems to you proof that Jesus of Nazareth is a deceiver, is proof that he is indeed a prophet, yea “that prophet which should come into the world.” For he foretold us this, “saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of

man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes: and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.”¹

In this manner both Peter himself and the rest of the apostles did act afterwards, when they were enlightened and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Threatened and assailed by these same rulers, they made a solemn appeal to God, (Acts iv. 29,) “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.”

We are told that the transgressions of the people of God are recorded for our example. And the practical lesson to be derived from Peter's unfaithfulness, is that we strengthen ourselves by all the means which Scripture supplies, against the hour of temptation. He himself has left it written (2 Pet. i. 5,) “Add to your faith, virtue;” i. e. boldness, resolution. It is a quality both rare and needful. The case of Peter shows, how different a thing it is to act consistently, when surrounded by pious connexions, and when mixed with those who are opposed to christian truth. Yet many live in the midst of such trials, and every Christian must expect to meet with them. Let him “sit down first, and count the cost;” and pray for grace that he may be enabled to act as one who does not deny his Lord.

¹ See ch. x. 33, 34.

Another effect may result from the record of this transgression. It may encourage the penitent. It may be among the means by which the promise is fulfilled, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." A sincere disciple of Christ may be overcome by temptation: may repent, and be forgiven. Perhaps there are those who, when living amongst pious friends, or under a strong conviction of truth, or in a season of alarm or sorrow, have made resolutions like that of Peter, *Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.* Perhaps they have afterwards acted as if they *knew not the man* to whom they had vowed obedience and loyalty. This might produce a feeling like despair, if they had not a proof before them in this history that they need not despair. Their Lord knoweth their infirmities. He may "visit their offences with the rod, and their sin with scourges;" but his loving kindness he will not utterly take from those, who "acknowledge their transgressions, and whose sin is ever before them."

Only if they take comfort from Peter's example, let it be certain that they imitate his penitence. *When he thought thereon, he wept.* "He went out, and wept bitterly." And he showed, by a life of obedience and zeal, that this was no momentary feeling, but evidence of a permanent conversion to his God and his Saviour.

LECTURE CXI.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS.

MARK xv. 1—28.

(Matt. xxvii. 12—38. Luke xxiii. 5—33. John xix. 1—18.)

1. *And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate.*

2. *And Pilate asked him, Art thou the king of the Jews? and he answering said unto him, Thou sayest it.*

3. *And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing.*

4. *And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee.*

5. *But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled.*

6. *Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired.*

7. *And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection.*

8. *And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them.*

9. *But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?*

10. *For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him or envy.*

11. *But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them.*

12. *And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews?*

13. *And they cried out again, Crucify him.*

14. *Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him.*

15. *And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.*

It was ordained concerning all the Jewish sacrifices, that the victims slain at the altar should be without blemish. Therefore, it was necessary that he who came to "fulfil the law," and to be a sacrifice once for all, should likewise be "holy and undefiled." So Jesus was pronounced to be, by the judge who was best able to decide. *Why, what evil hath he done?* "I find no fault in him." How then did Pilate agree to become the instrument of his crucifixion? *He was willing to content the people.* The people would have it so. And he chose to commit a murder under the form of law, rather than disappoint them. He had no fear of God to overcome his fear of man.

Thus the covetousness of Judas, the malice of the chief priests, the criminal weakness of Pilate, all contribute to bring about the counsel of God: and "the Son of man goeth as it was written of him." But woe unto them, who here indulged their covetousness, their malice, and their injustice. The purpose of God was accomplished; but the wickedness was all their own.

16. *And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Prætorium; and they call together the whole band.*

17. *And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head,*

18. *And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews!*

19. *And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him.*

20. *And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.*

21. *And they compel one Simon, a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.¹*

22. *And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, the place of a skull.*

23. *And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh : but he received it not.²*

24. *And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.*

25. *And it was the third hour, and they crucified him.*

26. *And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

27. *And with him they crucify two thieves ; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left.*

28. *And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.*

He, who was “without spot of sin,” was numbered with the transgressors, and suffered the penalty of sin. Because “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.” The “just” suffered for “the unjust.” The innocent bore the chastisement of the guilty, and procured their peace with God.

¹ It appears from St. John, that Jesus also shared the burthen. “He bearing his cross went forth.” Finding as they proceeded that more strength was required, they pressed into the service this Simon the Cyrenian.

² It is believed that this was offered with the intent of stupifying the senses, and diminishing the sense of pain. Pity is often found even among scenes of cruelty : and blessed are those that show it. Jesus, however, *received it not*. “The cup which his Father had given him, should he not drink it ?”

We know why this was required. We know how, from the time when Adam sinned, and brought his own corruption and condemnation upon the whole race of his posterity, man became a debtor to God's justice. He is "the King of all the earth." Shall man rebel against his rightful Sovereign, and no punishment ensue? Can God behold with the same eyes righteousness and unrighteousness? No. We are assured, that he "cannot look upon evil." What then remains? On one side, God offended—his will despised—his authority defied. On the other side, sinful, helpless, wretched man. What, I say, remains, but "tribulation and anguish?" What, but "the terrors of the Lord?" "the blackness of darkness for ever;" "outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth?"³

Such must have been the end, if the Son had not consented to stand in the stead of our guilty race, and said, "Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God. I am content to do it." And then could God say, "Deliver them from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom."⁴ He was a sufficient ransom, who being without sin, could atone for man's guilt; he was our ransom, who taking our nature upon him, could die our death, suffer our penalty.

Thus, he who was without transgression, came to be *numbered with the transgressors*. And God permitted, nay, decreed it, that he might show himself at the same time just, in punishing sin, and merciful, in pardoning the penitent. This was the

³ See the apostle's argument, Rom. ii. and iii.

⁴ Job xxxiii. 24.

design from the beginning, that justice and mercy might agree together: that God might display to all the world the heinousness of sin, and yet might remit its penalty.

Let us ever bear in mind, for what intent Christ *was numbered with transgressors*. That we might be delivered from the consequences of transgression, and be “accounted righteous before God.” But we are “bought with this price,” not that we may fashion ourselves “according to the corruption which is in the world,” but that we may “glorify God in our body and our spirit, which are his.” “He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Let it be ever manifest both by our principles and our practice, that we are among those who are “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

LECTURE CXII.

SUFFERINGS OF JESUS.—HIS BURIAL.

MARK xv. 29—47.

IN returning to the cross of Jesus, we cannot but observe that many things conspired to render his sufferings unusually severe. It commonly happens that the pity, if not even the favour of the multi-

tude, is directed to wards those who die by public execution. The two malefactors, who had gone about doing evil instead of good, were not assailed by the popular fury. All was directed against Him, who was now "bearing our sins in his own body on the tree."

(Matt. xxvii. 39—54. Luke xxiii. 35—56. John xix. 25—41.)

29. *And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days,*

30. *Save thyself, and come down from the cross.*

31. *Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save.*

32. *Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.*

33. *And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.*

34. *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

35. *And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias.*

36. *And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.*

37. *And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.*

38. *And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.*

39. *And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he cried and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.*

Thus it soon became manifest, that the Father

had not really *forsaken* his beloved Son, and that there was a divine purpose, now quickly to be developed, in all this suffering. And the aggravating circumstances which are related to us, and disclose the reality of that suffering, tend to make the cross of Jesus that instructive thing to us which it was designed to prove.

Two inferences deserve especial attention.

1. The misery endured by Jesus was very real and very terrible. Not to insist on anything beyond the literal history: the foretaste of what he was about to undergo, which occasioned his agony in the garden of Gethsemane: the torture of the scourge, and the crown of thorns, and the cruel violence of the soldiers; together with the gradual extinction of life by the anguish of the cross: all these make up an actual accumulation of sufferings from which our minds recoil: which we are unwilling to contemplate. We had rather not “look and see, whether there has been any sorrow like unto his sorrow.”

Yet God permitted this; who wills not the misery of any: for “God is love.” He permitted it in the case of one most dear to him: for Jesus was his “beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased.”

We have, therefore, a proof that such things may be allowed for wise though mysterious purposes,* and are not a sign that He has forgotten those who suffered them. The sufferings of Jesus were ordained for a reason known to us now, and known to be most merciful, though understood not then even by the apostles, and misinterpreted by

others, who presumed that God would have delivered him, if he had a favour unto him. Therefore we may feel the same assurance in other cases, and may find in it a consolation to alleviate similar trials, when the people of God are placed, as frequently they are placed, under the pressure of protracted distress, or pain, or poverty.

2. The second suggestion concerns those who suffer in mind, not in body; who labour under a dread of God's anger, and painfully feel their habitual sinfulness, or their actual transgressions. Those that "weep now," ought not to be objects of wonder or censure. Who can blame, or be surprised at any whose heart is disquieted within them, when they look back upon their negligences and ignorances, their omissions of known duty, or their presumptuous sins? But they who have this deep sense of their own unworthiness, are the very persons who may be safely encouraged and comforted. And here is the comfort. However heavy the burthen of sin may be, it has been removed. However large the debt, it has been paid. Here, on the cross, the penalty of sin was exacted; and here it was undergone. Why was all the suffering which has been related, consented to by Christ, and why was it enforced by God, except to give the penitent debtor his discharge, and to make the "satisfaction for his sins full, perfect, and sufficient?" So that "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" whose faith has applied to their hearts the sprinkling of that "blood which cleanseth from all sin." "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." "It pleased

the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief," for this very purpose, that the broken heart might be bound up, and the spirit of the contrite ones revived.

40. *There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome ;*

41. *(Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him :) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem.*

42. *And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath,*

43. *Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.*

44. *And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead : and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead.*

45. *And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.*

46. *And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre.*

47. *And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.*

Thus was He overcome by death, who has taken away its sting. Thus was he laid in the grave, who has spoiled the grave of its victory : and has enabled his disciples to say, " Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

There was indeed a prophecy respecting him,

which, if it had been rightly understood, might have encouraged Joseph when he gave him this honourable burial, and have consoled the women who *beheld where he was laid*. It had been declared, (Psalm xvi. 10,) “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” This was not sufficiently understood to comfort the mourners then. But it may comfort mourners now. For though, in one respect, the promise which concerned the Holy One, does not extend to his disciples:—“our vile body” must perish—ashes must return to ashes, and dust to dust; still may “our heart be glad, our flesh also shall rest in hope.” The spirits of the just are blessed, though “left” for a while in the place appointed them: and their bodies shall be raised at the last, and made like unto Christ’s glorious body, to live for ever in that presence where “is fulness of joy.”

LECTURE CXIII.

THE RESURRECTION.

THE APOSTLES COMMISSIONED TO PREACH THE GOSPEL.

MARK xvi. 1—20.

1. *And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.*

2. *And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.*

3. *And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre ?*

4. *And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away : for it was very great.*

5. *And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment ; and they were affrighted.*

6. *And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted ; ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified : he is risen ; he is not here : behold the place where they laid him.*

7. *But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee : there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.*

8. *And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre ; for they trembled and were amazed : neither said they any thing to any man ; for they were afraid.¹*

¹ Their consternation, the mixture of hope and fear in their minds, prevented their relating to any whom they met in their way to the disciples, what they had seen and heard.

Thus quickly were the doubts dispersed of these faithful women, who had expected to find the entrance of the sepulchre shut against them. *The stone was rolled away.*

If we do as they did, and act the part of zealous love, though in the midst of natural fears and infirmities, we shall often find that God has done his part before we were aware, and smoothed away those difficulties which we expected to embarrass our path of duty and hinder our success.

It did not, however, at once strike them that this was the work of God. Their hearts were hardened, and "as yet they knew not the Scriptures that he must rise from the dead." They did not congratulate one another, saying, Thus is the prophecy fulfilled; God "has not left his soul in hell, nor suffered his Holy One to see corruption."² The first impression was, that their enemies "had taken away their Lord, and they knew not where they had laid him."³ But the heavenly ministers who watched over the scene, suggested to their minds the truth, though it could not immediately clear up their doubts or dispel their fears. *He is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.*

Tell his disciples *and Peter*. And was not Peter a disciple? Perhaps he scarcely dared consider himself as such, after his sad apostasy. He had denied all knowledge of his Lord; and would his Lord acknowledge him? Yes: he is "touched

² See Acts ii. 31.

³ See John xx. 2.

with our infirmities ;” he has pardoned the weakness of his repentant servant ; he has still a commission to entrust him with, and will enable him to show, by a life of faithfulness, that the grace bestowed on him had not been bestowed in vain.

When the others hastened away, musing, no doubt, on the strange things which they had seen and heard, Mary Magdalene, it appears, remained “at the sepulchre weeping.” Thus she became the first to behold the person of her risen Lord. So the narrative proceeds to tell us.

9. Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.

10. And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept.

11. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.

12. After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country.

13. And they went and told it unto the residue : neither believed they them.

14. Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

15. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

17. And these signs shall follow them that believe ; In my name shall they cast out devils ; they shall speak with new tongues ;

18. They shall take up serpents ; and if they drink any

deadly thing, it shall not hurt them ; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

19. *So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.*

20. *And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.*

Thus briefly are the events related, being more fully told elsewhere, which established the christian faith through the agency of the apostles. *They went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.* The book of "Acts" describes this; where we read, for example, (viii. 5—8,) "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many which were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city."

Such were the *signs which followed them that believed.* By degrees, this miraculous power was withdrawn from the preachers of the gospel. He who conferred it, knew when it ceased to be needful; knew when the ordinary evidence, on which we credit things which we have not seen, became so strong and sufficient, that men in every land might be justly required to "repent, and believe the gospel."

But although this outward proof of Christ's su-

perintendence over his Church is removed, and he no longer confirms the word of his ministers with *signs following*; his Spirit accompanies them still, and will be with them “always, even unto the end of the world.” He will be with them as he was with Paul, that “utterance may be given them, and they may open their mouths boldly and make known the mystery of the gospel.”⁴ And he will be with their hearers also, as with Lydia, whose “heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things spoken of Paul.”⁵ He has not died in vain; and the word which proclaims his death for our sins, and his rising again for our justification, “shall not return unto him void.” It shall accomplish the purpose of that death and resurrection. It shall accomplish the salvation of every soul which receives it. “For there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

May He then, who has wrought out this salvation for us, be pleased also to work out this salvation in us! May He strengthen our faith and direct our practice, and enable us to live as believers in his name and heirs of his glory!

⁴ Eph. vi. 19.

⁵ Acts xvi, 14.

THE END.

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